FLASH

TV TRIUMPH— OR TRAVESTY?

#88

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

DANNY BILSON
SERIES WRITER/
PRODUCER SPEAKS

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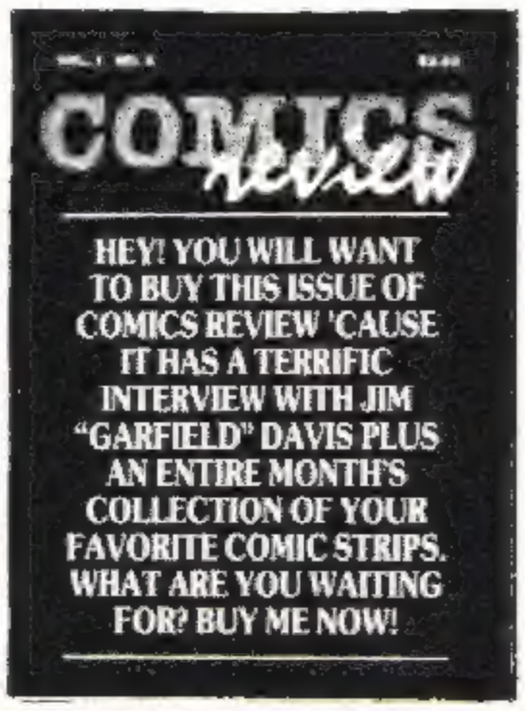
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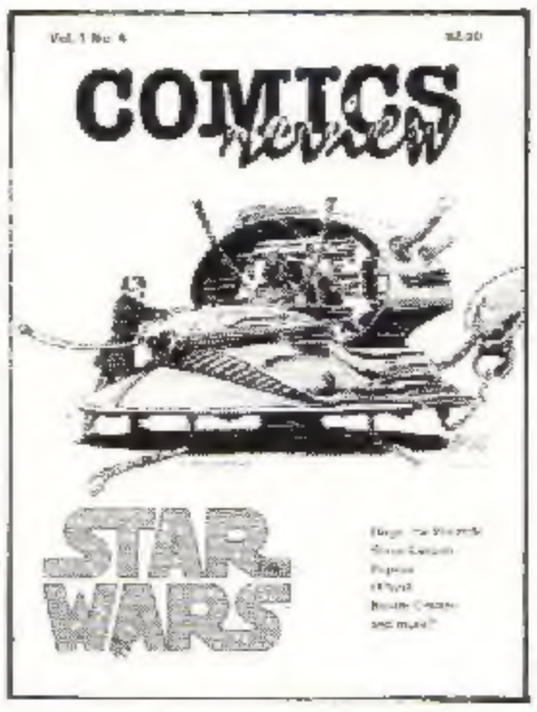

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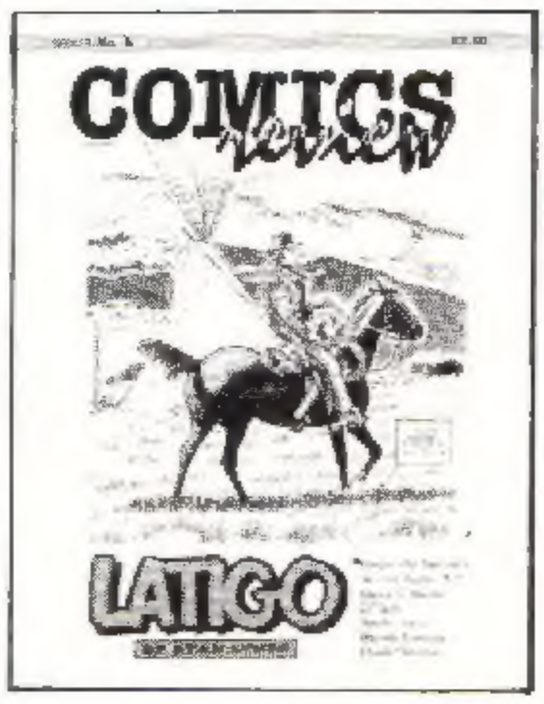

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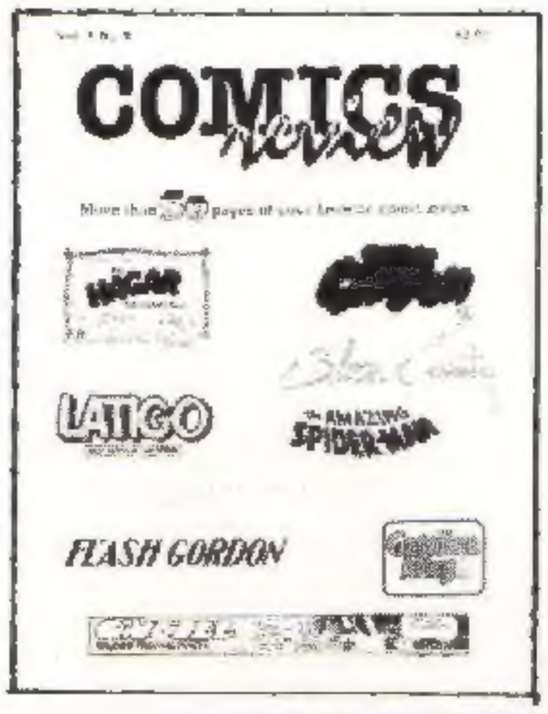

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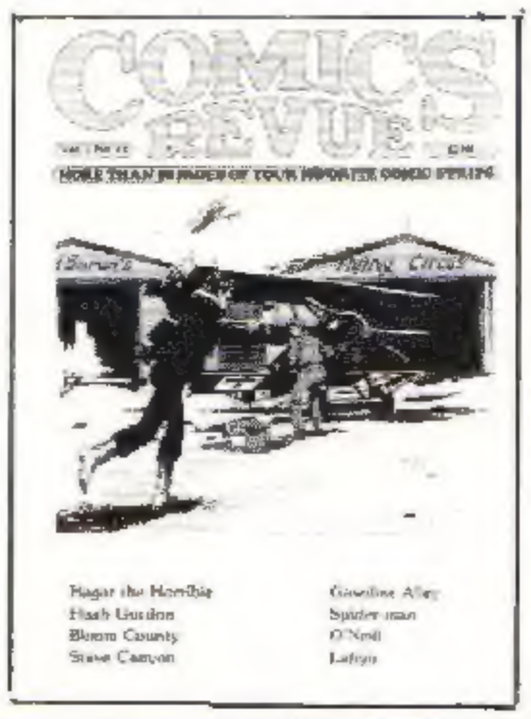

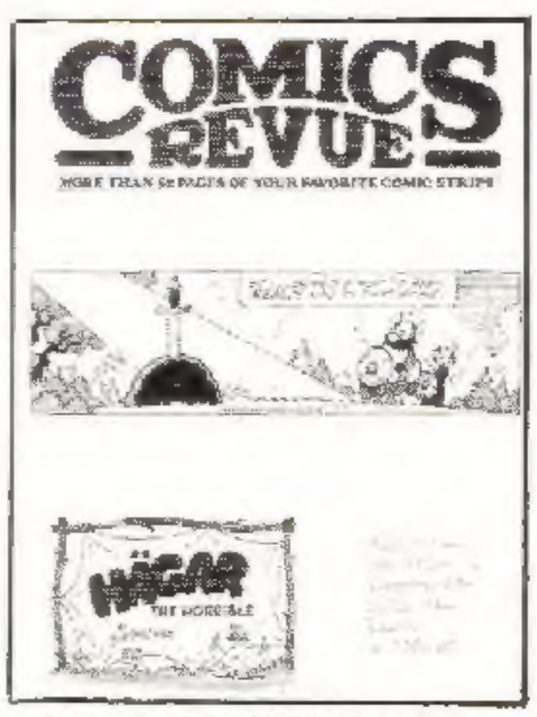

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UP FRONT

Am I the only one who's disappointed with THE FLASH on TV?

I usually don't offer my opinions here in this space, preferring to adhere to the founding philosophy of COMICS INTERVIEW, which provides that this magazine is an organ for the opinions of others — not a place for the publisher to grind his own axe. (Never mind that *some* have made a career and built a reputation doing just that.)

But.

But I made a point of watching THE FLASH. Both writers/ producers **Danny Bilson** (interviewed this issue) and **Paul DeMeo** (who will appear next issue to talk about the upcoming ROCKETEER movie) not only are familiar with "post-modern" comics, but also sound genuinely interested in making a splash with THE FLASH.

Unfortunately, to my eye it looks like the kind of a splash that comes from doing a spectacular flop off the high board.

Predictable cliches abound in story and dialogue. The acting (with the possible exception of **Amanda Pays**) is lukewarm and unconvincing. What is it that makes TV actors so utterly unable to bring conviction to their roles? Perhaps the directing. The set ups, scene framing, camera work and pacing were all lack-luster. Standard TV superhero fare.

THE FLASH is what the BATMAN movie *would* have been, if the same script had been shot for TV without benefit of adequate directing, acting and editing.

But why? Why must TV series be mediocre? I don't believe it's as simple as the budgets, the money. Good films have been made for very little money. It was easier to dismiss the sad showing of superheroes on television when the programs were produced by those who neither knew nor respected comics.

It's harder to take, somehow, from those who seem to care. Is it just the curse of TV? And why is it so likely that THE ROCKETEER movie will be every bit as exciting as THE FLASH TV show is disappointing?

Does anyone out there have an answer?

Or am I the only one who feels this way?

-Dave

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PRODUCER

"I started developing a series inspired by WATCHMEN."

This fall, for the first time, the postmodern super-hero will appear on the home screen. Influenced by the work of Alan Moore, Frank Miller, Howard Chaykin and Dave Stevens, producers Danny Bilson and Paul DeMeo have developed The Flash into an hour-long Warner Bros series for CBS. John Wesley Shipp, the soap star who played Kelly on THE GUIDING LIGHT, stars as Barry Allen, a police scientist who gains super speed in a freak chemical accident. Paula Marshall plays his girlfriend, Iris West, and Amanda Pays (Theora Jones of MAX HEADROOM) portrays his fellow scientist, Tina McGee. Unfortunately, because the series is scheduled against both COSBY and THE SIMPSONS, it's in danger of becoming a Flash in the pan. But all is not lost, as Bilson reveals . . .

DAN HAGEN: *What's the evolution of this series. How did it come about?*

DANNY BILSON: Two years ago, my partner and I started developing a series that I would call inspired by this comic book called THE WATCHMEN. But since Warner Bros. owns DC Comics, we used the Flash and the Green Arrow and a couple of obscure characters — Dr. Occult and Blok. It took place in this world after super-heroes had been outlawed.

DAN: *This was for TV?*

DANNY: For CBS, yes.

DAN: *Kind of a science fiction, super-hero thing?*

DANNY: Yeah. The Flash was like 45 years old. So what happened was, they decided to redevelop THE FLASH as a TV movie. They were going to do three: Flash, Wonder Woman and Suicide Squad or something. And then **Jeff Sagansky** took over and basically threw out the other stuff and said he wants to make a series out of THE FLASH and he'd like a two-hour movie to launch it. So we've been kind of working with THE FLASH for two years now.

DAN: *And your partner is who?*

DANNY: Paul DeMeo.

DAN: *And did you grow up with comics?*

DANNY: Yeah, I did. Paul was more into the super-heroes. I used to read the stupid stuff, Herbie and Archie. I think when I was about 12 to 15 I started reading super-hero comics. I didn't start as young as he did.

DAN: *How old are you now, if you don't mind my asking?*

DANNY: I'm 34. In about 1984, we were writing these B science-fiction movies for Empire Pictures. That's kind of where we started. We used to go to the comics store, and around the early '80s is when the new, sort of what I call the "revisionist" comics started coming out.

DAN: *DARK KNIGHT and so forth?*

DANNY: THE DARK KNIGHT and **Howard Chaykin's** AMERICAN FLAGG and eventually THE WATCHMEN, which is probably one of my favorites.

DAN: *Mine, too.*

DANNY: As a matter of fact, **Howard Chaykin** is our story editor on the show. Howard and **John Moore,** who are both comics writers, are now permanently affixed here at Warner Bros. working on THE FLASH.

DAN: *That's great.*

DANNY: It gives it a certain edge.

DAN: *That's very encouraging. One never knows. I just heard of the project when it was announced on the wire service from CBS, and I thought, "Is it going to be another WONDER WOMAN or . . .?"*

DANNY: No, no. This is definitely inspired by a combination of THE DARK KNIGHT, WATCHMEN and AMERICAN FLAGG.

DAN: *So this is not camp super-hero stuff?*

DANNY: *(Laughter.)* By no means. It's pretty dark, it's pretty dark. And, knowing something about it, you know the BATMAN movie was totally inspired by that stuff, too. It wasn't **Tim Burton's** original vision. So we're kind of in that world. I like to think of it as definitely related to the BATMAN movie. The storytelling is obviously a little more accessible, I would say.

DAN: *The Flash was kind of a light character, though, and there's a certain silliness about super-heroes, anyway. How do you approach that and keep a grim edge?*

DANNY: The only thing that gets anywhere near like that is when, as Barry Allen, he winds up using his powers in

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DANNY

comics 4 interview

DANNY BILSON

"The Flash only functions at night, more like Batman."

more domestic situations. There's a scene in the pilot where he cleans his apartment.

DAN: *Very fast?*

DANNY: Very fast. And of course he causes a tornado and it gets out of control and it makes a big mess, so it doesn't really even work. There'll be some of that in the series. And in the series, the Flash only functions at night, he only puts on the suit at night. Sort of more like Batman. Frankly, the suit isn't going to look too good in hard daylight. It's much more mysterious. And Central City is its own world in the show.

BILSON

"We're not doing THE WIZARD OF SPEED AND

DAN: *Like Gotham City in the movie?*
DANNY: Yeah, but it's more midwestern. It's sort of a '40s meets '90s style.
DAN: *I always thought Central City was probably Chicago.*
DANNY: It is. I always think of it in our show as being a little closer to, like, Des Moines or something. A little smaller than Chicago. It's not a big megalopolis like that. It's more of a '40s Chicago than it is a '90s Chicago. It's pretty interesting. There are no glass buildings, no skyscrapers. It's all art deco, a lot of red brick.
DAN: *Great. Are people startled at the appearance of a super-hero?*
DANNY: Well, actually, only one or two people have seen him by the end of the pilot, and they're talking about this red phantom or this ghost. They don't know what they saw. We're going to be developing that over the series to where Central City gets to know the Flash. They haven't yet.
DAN: *Of course, there was the weird stuff in the comics when Barry Allen was the Flash; for example, he would be running across a room at light speed talking to a villain. One never knew exactly how that worked.*
DANNY: *(Laughter.)* Well, we don't do that, exactly. I think that the running effects are similar to the way they look in the book, you know, with the blur . . .
DAN: *Like a streak?*
DANNY: Yeah, it's really neat. I didn't want to do any . . .
DAN: *That awful stuff that SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN did.*
DANNY: We're not doing that. We're not doing slow-motion shit, and we're not doing the WIZARD OF SPEED AND TIME, either. There's some of that in the domestic stuff, but when he's running after villains, yes, it's undercranked, but it's smeared. It's pretty interesting. And then composited with the backgrounds. It's shot against black instead of blue so it gets more translucent. It's pretty effective.
DAN: *I see. Now, can he do the comics*

Barry Allen, alias The Flash, as portrayed by actor John Wesley Shipp. He can be seen doing his streaking bit on the two previous pages.

TIME — it's pretty interesting. It's pretty effective."

stuff? Run on water, run up the sides of buildings, vibrate through walls?

DANNY: Not yet. We tried not to develop . . .

DAN: *The whole thing?*

DANNY: Yeah, so we have something to do later. There's plenty going on. It's also played sort of like THE FLY, where the powers aren't "Oh, gee . . ."

DAN: *"Neato, I've got super powers!"*

DANNY: Yes. It's not like "Neato, I can chase a taxicab." He is late for something. He goes running after a bus and loses control and runs like 30 miles to the beach and hits the water. And there's like an explosion and his clothes are all torn off and he collapses on the beach. It's not like, "Oh, gee whiz," you know.

DAN: *Yeah. Well, super powers would of course be a frightening thing, when you think about it.*

DANNY: That's how we're playing it, absolutely. And he doesn't even know, exactly, what his powers are, even by the end of the two-hour pilot. It's all pretty unknown, and there are a lot of side effects. We're using some of the Wally West Flash stuff, like he has to eat a lot.

DAN: *Speeded-up metabolism.*

DANNY: Metabolic problems.

DAN: *I guess you've introduced a character for him to talk to, too, a fellow scientist?*

DANNY: Tina McGee is from the Wally West Flash, and she's played by **Amanda Pays,** who was in MAX HEADROOM. And he has a sidekick in the crime lab in Julio, but so far Julio doesn't know he's the Flash. The only person who knows is Tina McGee.

DAN: *And then there's Iris West, his girlfriend, right?*

DANNY: His girlfriend who we'll probably be losing somewhere in the first few episodes so he can have a different woman coming into his life. That was kind of a network decision. In the pilot, Iris West is his girlfriend. So we have drawn from the comics, yet matured it, like a lot of the new comic books do, you know.

And in full body suit as designed by Dave (Rocketeer) Stevens, The Flash.

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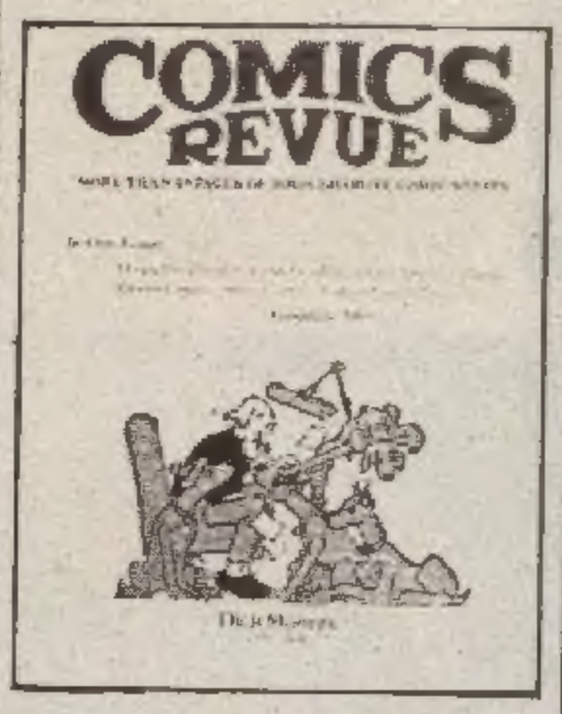

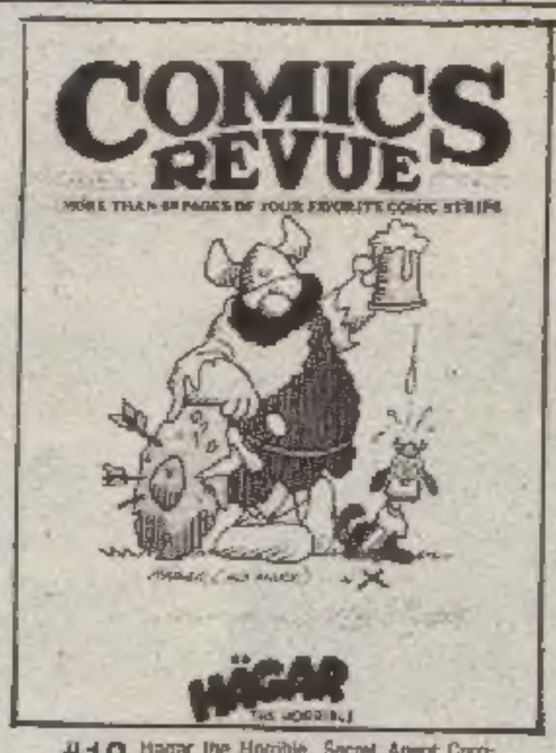

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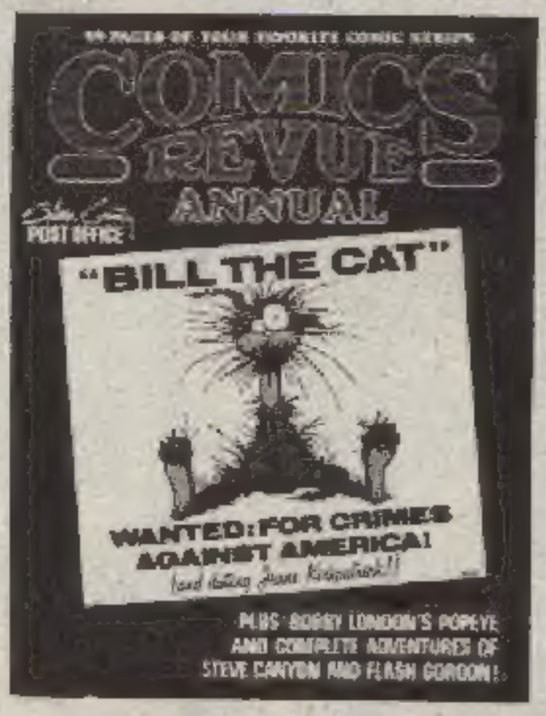
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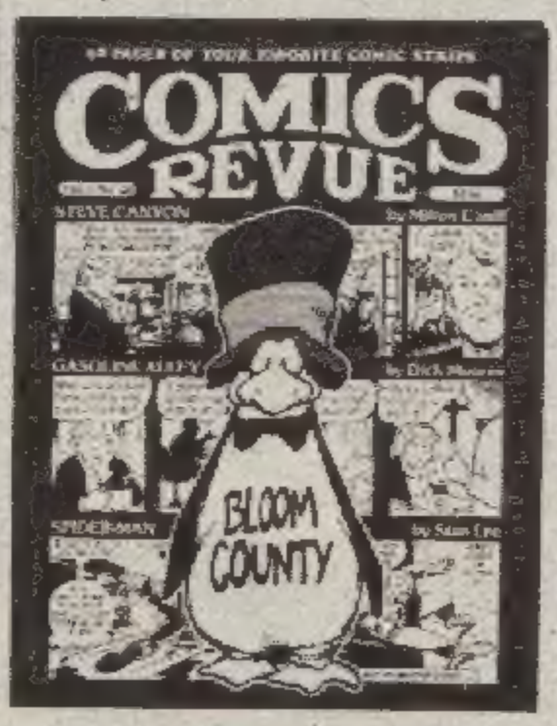

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"This is our first thing, so we're trying to break rules."

DAN: *That's a fascinating approach. This is the first time I can think of that TV has really taken the new, modern look at super-heroes.*

DANNY: Right. Well, that's because we just know the books. That's what we read.

DAN: *In the old days, it was always somebody who'd been working in TV. They'd get thrown this project, like a WONDER WOMAN or whatever, and they think, "Geez, what do I do with this?"*

DANNY: Right. Well, in this case, Paul and I come from features. And we have been in television development here for four years, but we've never, ever written an episode of any show. We've never worked on a show before. This is totally our first thing, so we're trying to break some of the rules. Now, we have a lot of battles to fight in order to do that, you know, because there's a lot of conservative thinking out there. They still think, "Give us the episode with the little kid who's in trouble." So we're going to do the episode with the little kid, but he turns out to be an evil genius who's trying to kill the Flash. *(Laughter.)* **Jeff Sagansky** doesn't know that yet.

DAN: *Is the costume in the ring? I just have to know that.*

DANNY: No, it's not. That's too much.

DAN: *That's what I figured.*

DANNY: The costume was, however, a major piece of business. After the BATMAN movie, there's no way you can put a guy in tights. The costume is a makeup effect. We spent about $100,000 just on the pilot, and we're investing about $150,000 for the series.

DAN: *Although I would say John Wesley Shipp would look okay in tights.*

DANNY: Have you seen him in the suit?

DAN: *No, I met him once, though. He was here doing OKLAHOMA in summer stock. He seemed a personable fellow.*

DANNY: He is, he is.

DAN: *I mean, he's built like a super-hero.*

DANNY: Yeah, and he's very good. But the suit looks like a comic hero is drawn. It's totally sculpted. Actually, are you familiar with the book THE ROCKETEER?

DAN: *Um hum.*

DANNY: That's our other movie project, but that's another story. That starts shooting the same day as THE FLASH, as the series. But **Dave Stevens**, who drew THE ROCKETEER, designed the Flash suit for the show. So it's very faithful to the original, but it's a little more streamlined. He doesn't have the yellow boots. They're dark red.

The Flash confronts Pike, the urban gang leader, as played by Michael Nader.

DAN: *Stevens is a beautiful artist.*

DANNY: Yeah, Dave's great. He's a good friend. Paul and I have been working on THE ROCKETEER for five years. It's just happening now.

DAN: *Why the Barry Allen Flash?*

DANNY: Because he's the classic Flash, I think. The Flash of our generation. And he was around for 25, 30 years or something. The Jay Garrick one was only around for, like, 10 — and the new one is a kid and not the character we wanted to do. We wanted to do a more mature character.

DAN: *I agree completely all the way around. It's kind of strange to be doing a character who's effectively dead in the comics though, isn't it?*

DANNY: Yeah, but you know, the film version is its own thing. I was talking to **Brian Augustyn,** who's the editor at DC. He was even, at one point, pushing for a FLASH comics series based on the TV show. So the TV show kind of combines all these elements.

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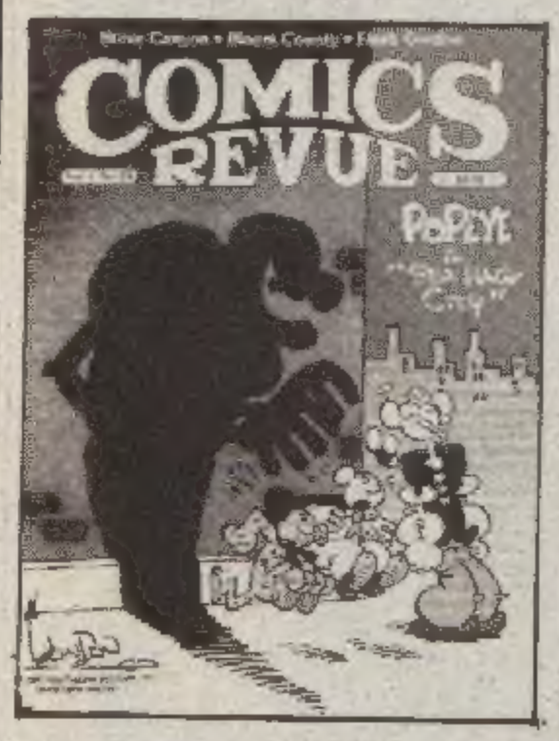

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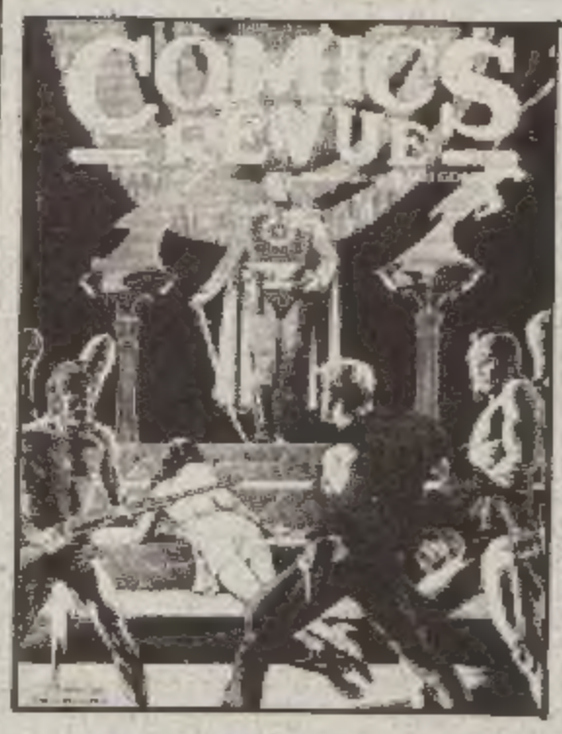

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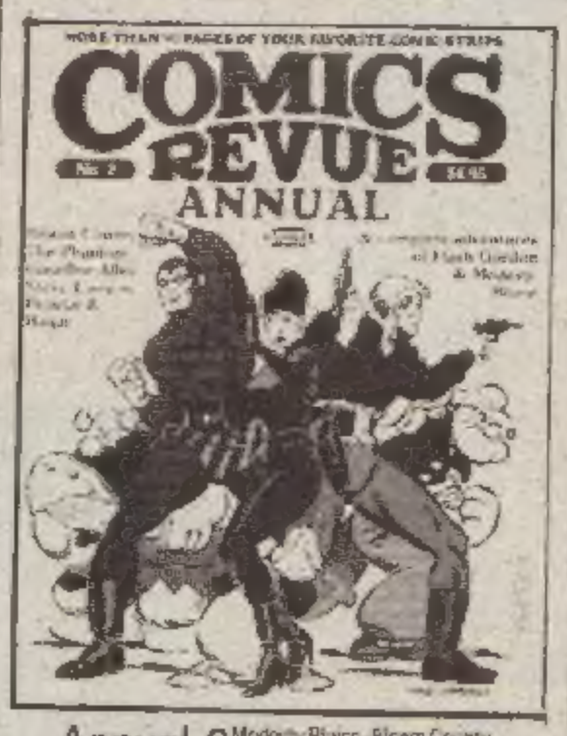

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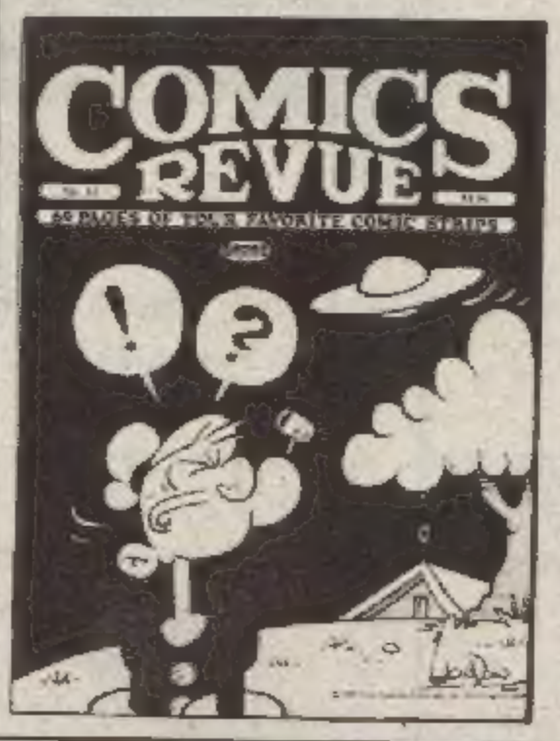
#33 Popeye, Modesty Blaise, Flash Gordon, Bloom County, Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible, The Phantom, Gasoline Alley



#34 The Phantom, Bloom County, Modesty Blaise, Hagar the Horrible, Steve Canyon, Popeye, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley, The Walker Family Tree

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"It's CBS's stab at getting a youth audience."

DAN: *I was thinking that the Flash can travel through time, so in the comics it wouldn't be a big deal to bring him back from the dead.*

DANNY: We don't even have to deal with that. That's another world.

DAN: *I think you made the right pick, though. Barry Allen is the best one, and the one that has the most nostalgia value built into it. Now, the time slot is a bite, though, right?*

DANNY: Well, the way I understand it is that they're going to premiere us there, and they feel it may become an event night on television, where there's enough audience to go around. If it doesn't work, after three weeks we're preempted for two weeks by baseball. We'll re-debut in a new time slot.

DAN: *Superb.*

DANNY: They're not going to mess with this show. They're not going to throw it away. It costs a lot of money, and it's CBS's stab at getting a youth audience. They had no idea that THE SIMPSONS was going there when they programmed it.

DAN: *Captain Cold and those people notwithstanding, the Flash never faced tougher foes than Bill Cosby and the Simpsons at once.*

DANNY: That's true. It's kind of funny. We're having a wrap party tonight, and the cake has the Flash stepping on Bart Simpson's head.

DAN: (Laughter.) *That's perfect. What about costumed villains? That was a big thing in the comic. Can you get away with that?*

DANNY: Well, **Jeff Sagansky** says no. We say we're going to do it sort of like the Joker and Batman. We are going to do a story in the first six about a guy who escapes from an Arkham Asylum-type place who, because the Flash exists, decides he's going to give himself a name and a costume.

DAN: *So you tie them in together, making it somewhat more logical.*

DANNY: Yeah, and Barry's going to feel responsible for creating this guy and have to go after him. He's killing people It's not going to be a cute villain, like the Batman series. He's going to be doing something horrible.

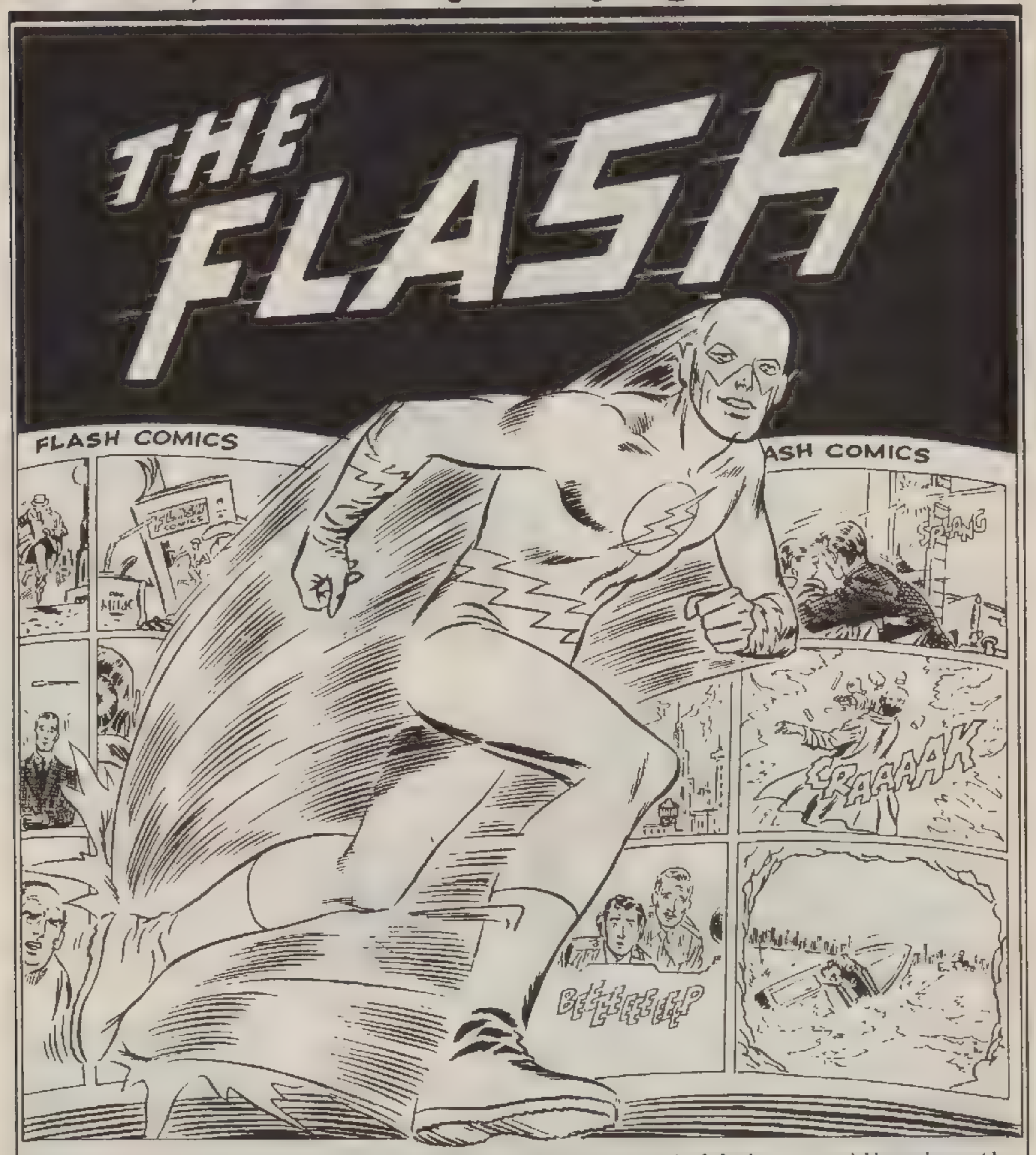
DAN: *You sold it without a pilot, I understand.*

DANNY: We just finished shooting the pilot last night. We did a presentation reel that's about 10 minutes long — like a

Amanda Pays and John Wesley Shipp build a close relationship when Barry Allen, aka The Flash, needs help from Dr. Christina McGee, as played by Pays, to control his newfound powers of speed.

"We'd never done TV, you know? We had

a vision, and we're just trying to execute it."



Splash page from "The Mystery of the Human Thunderbolt" as illustrated by Carmine Infantino — a rare inking assignment by Joe Kubert.

long trailer. So we shot two units in the first two weeks in order to get enough footage to make it effective. And it's great, it's really great.

DAN: *How did you know, going into this, that you could actually do this? A guy moving at superspeed and everything, it seems like a tricky proposition to do on TV.*

DANNY: Maybe because we'd never done TV, you know? We had a vision, and we're just trying to execute it. And it costs money. It costs more money than LIFE GOES ON, you know.

DAN: *What do you think of the approach taken thus far to the super-heroes that have appeared on prime-time, live action TV?*

DANNY: Oh, unwatchable, basically. I think BATMAN had its place in the '60s, but it had to do with that sort of pop culture stuff at the time. I mean, I was a kid, and I really liked it for a while, but then it burned out.

DAN: *Because it was so campy, even for a kid.*

DANNY: There was no adventure involved. The bad guys weren't bad. There was nothing, really, to root for. It was just sort of a goof.

COMICS REVUE

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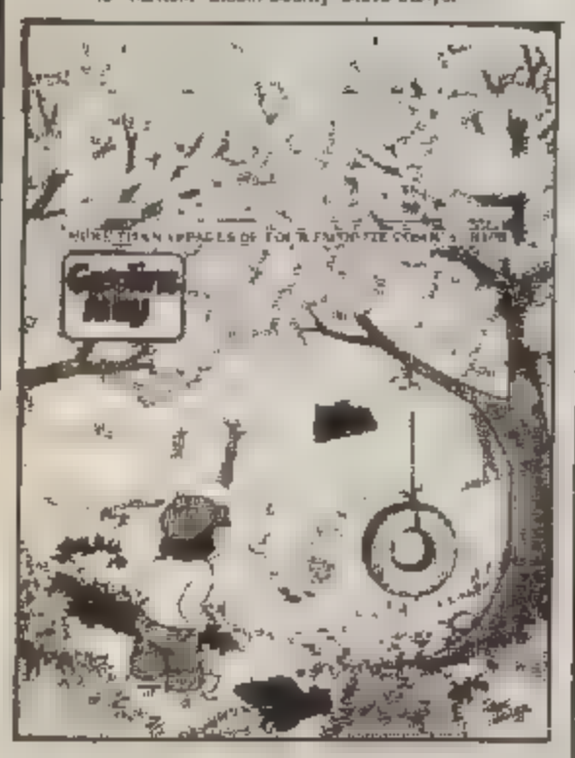
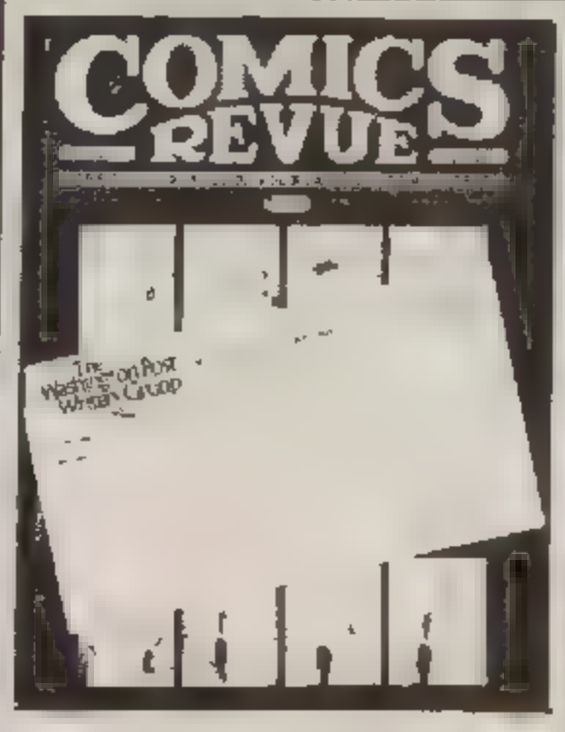
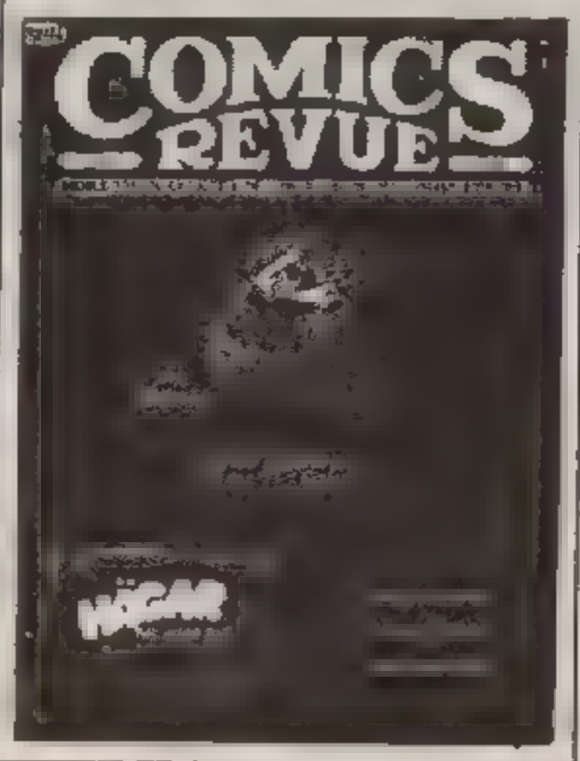




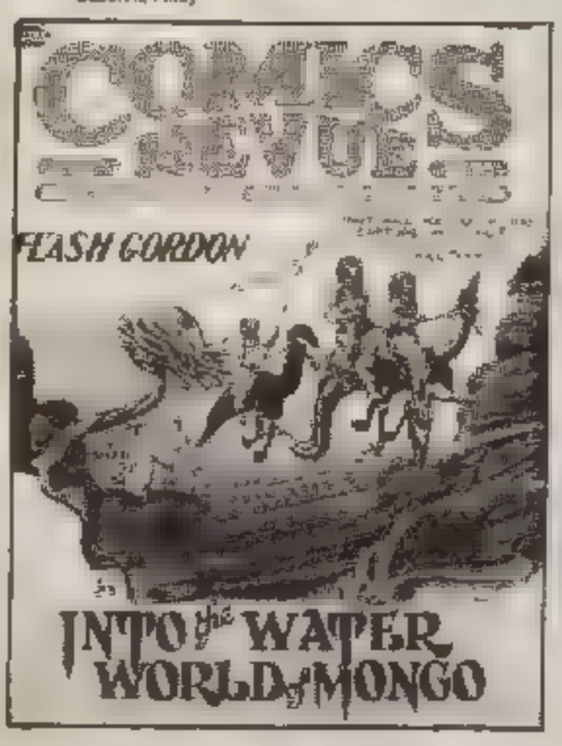
#36 Bloom County, The Phantom, Beetle Bailey, Popeye, Flash Gordon, Hagar the Horrible, Steve Canyon

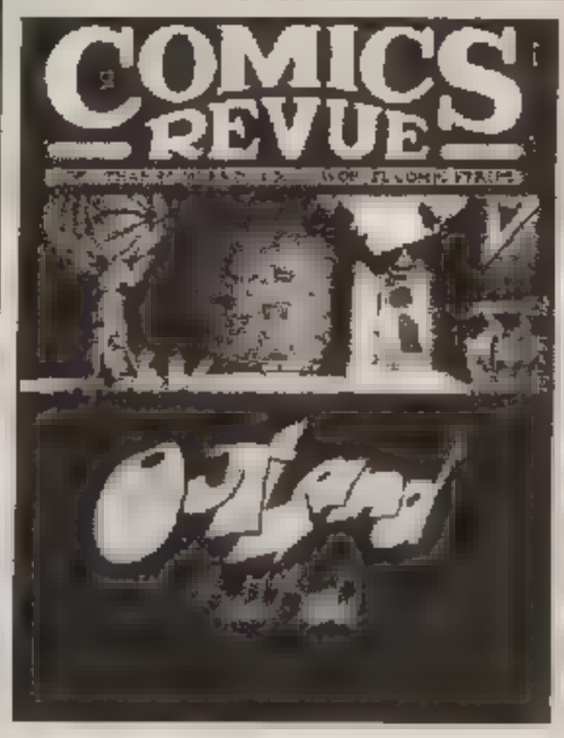
#37 Hagar the Horrible, Steve Canyon, The Phantom, Latigo, Blondie, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley



#38 Hagar the Horrible, The Phantom, Bloom County, Steve Canyon

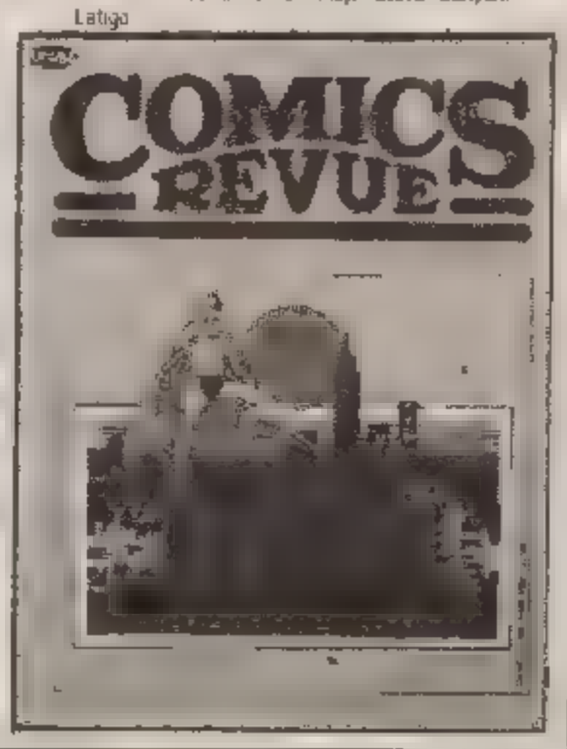
#39 Flash Gordon, Hagar the Horrible, Latigo, Popeye, Steve Canyon, Bloom County, Gasoline Alley





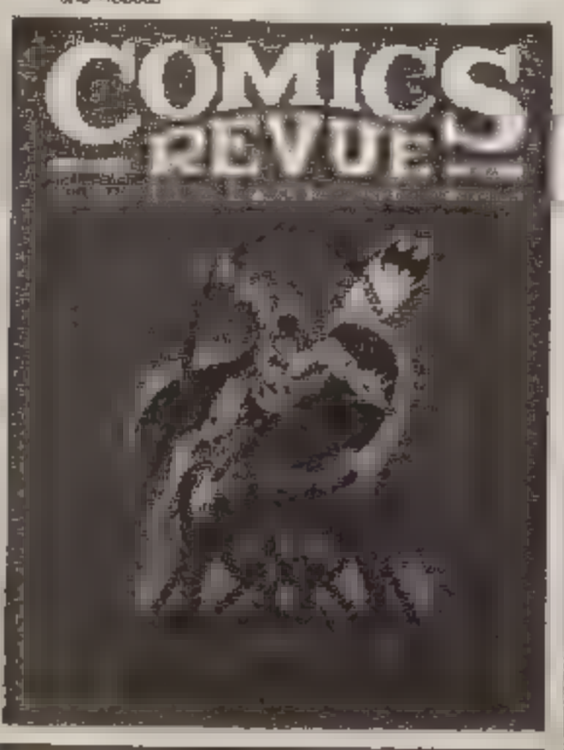
#40 Outland, Latigo, Hagar the Horrible, The Phantom, Gasoline Alley, Steve Canyon, Bloom County, Flash Gordon, Modesty Blaise

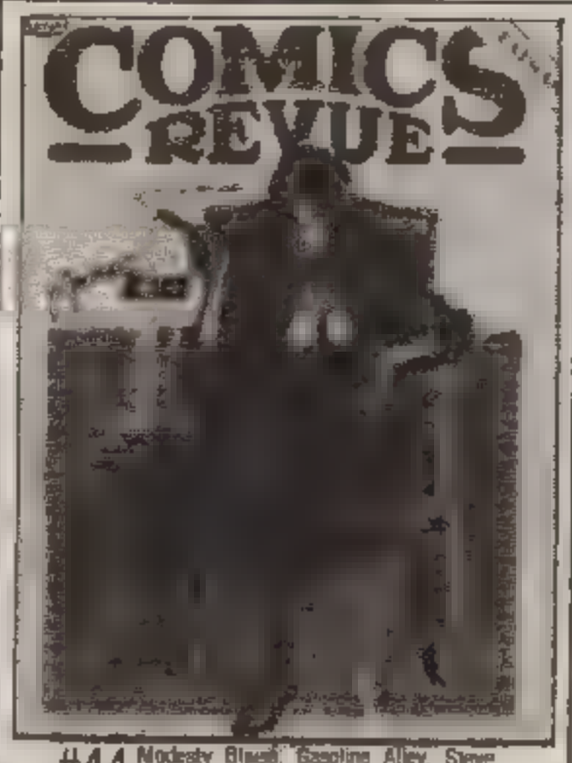
#41 Batman, Outland, Modesty Blaise, Bloom County, Flash Gordon, Hagar the Horrible, The Phantom, Gasoline Alley, Steve Canyon, Latigo



#42 Calvin and Hobbes, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley, Modesty Blaise, Outland, Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible, The Phantom, Bloom County, Batman

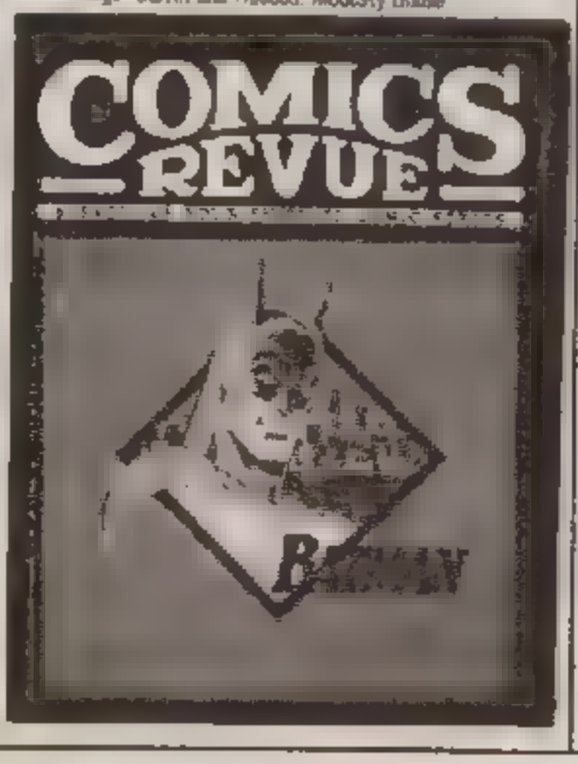
#43 Batman, Bloom County, The Phantom, Hagar the Horrible, Latigo, Gasoline Alley, Flash Gordon, Outland, Steve Canyon, Calvin and Hobbes





#44 Modesty Blaise, Gasoline Alley, Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible, Flash Gordon, Calvin and Hobbes, The Phantom, Outland, Latigo, Bloom County, Batman

#45 Batman, Outland, The Phantom, Hagar the Horrible, Blondie, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley, Steve Canyon, Bloom County, Latigo, Calvin and Hobbes, Modesty Blaise



#46 Flash Gordon, Modesty Blaise, Bloom County, Latigo, The Phantom, Calvin and Hobbes, Steve Canyon, Batman, Gasoline Alley

A COMICS INTERVIEW PUBLICATION

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"You absolutely believe it. We don't make fun of it."

Julio Mendez, lab assistant to Barry Allen in THE FLASH, as portrayed by actor Alex Desert.

DAN: *And you, the audience, were being made fun of.*

DANNY: Basically, yeah. What I always say is, and this goes way back to creating the show, if you ever read comic books, you read them to believe them, not to make fun of them. So those books that I was talking about earlier, that were created in the '80s, made them believable for adults. And that's kind of the tone we use. You absolutely believe it. We don't make fun of it at all. And it does have humor, but it's all humor that comes out of the character, and not laughing at itself.

DAN: *I always thought they couldn't do THE INCREDIBLE HULK on TV, but they did a pretty successful job, for a character so outlandish.*

DANNY: My taste leans a little more toward action-adventure than those.

DAN: *That sort of TV drama thing.*

DANNY: Which they're trying to push THE FLASH into, and we're just fighting it.

DAN: *You hate to see the characters standing around being talking heads, and sort of "earnest, caring people" all the time.*

DANNY: Exactly. And they're already pushing for that.

DAN: *That would be the bit where he's the Flash on the half-hour and the close, and that would be it, right?*

DANNY: And we're trying to avoid that.

DAN: *Right. So formulaic you can predict every episode.*

DANNY: We're not those kinds of writers. We've never written television. And there are some interesting writers on the staff. So hopefully there will be a mixture of all kinds of stuff.

DAN: *What did you think of the SUPERMAN movies?*

DANNY: I liked the first half of the

"Barry Allen is this very driven guy."

Promotional artwork by Joe Orlando on the cover envelope from Warner Bros.' press kit.

"A guy who gets obsessive. But is he a total sicko?"

first one. The first hour of the first one was great

DAN: *The mythic wheat fields of Kansas, that sort of thing?*

DANNY: Yeah, it was fantastic. And then as soon as you saw **Ned Beatty** walking down the street with that dorky music, everything went to hell. On the second one, I thought the script was better than the first one, but it wasn't as well directed. The second one was pretty good. After that

DAN: *I enjoyed the idea of Metropolis being trashed, supervillains everywhere. Comic books on the screen.*

DANNY: And also the idea of Superman not wanting to fight and all that . . .

DAN: *And being beaten up by some truck driver in a diner.*

DANNY: I liked the second one, too.

DAN: *And then progressive deterioration.*

DANNY: Yes, unwatchable. That fourth one is unwatchable.

DAN: *And BATMAN was pretty successful, eh?*

DANNY: Yeah. I thought it had a great mood and the two characters were great I thought the storytelling sucked. You know, they didn't let the audience root for Batman. He didn't do anything. The only scene that was really good was where he rescued her from the museum

DAN: *Where he crashes through the skylight, I agree.*

DANNY: And then he stops in the middle of traffic, gets out and walks and everything goes to hell. *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *He's also instantly running away: Not a very Batman-like thing to do. He should at least beat up a few of them on the spot.*

DANNY: Right. Hopefully in the sequel, it'll be a little tighter storytelling. But certainly the mood and the way they played it straight was great.

DAN: *Now, with the grim approach you're talking about, the question is are they super-heroes anymore, or are they disturbed guys? There's the super-hero as icon, and then there's the super-hero as a kind of schizoid*

DANNY: Well, we haven't gone in that schizoid direction. Barry Allen is this very driven guy in a human way because he's a guy, at least in our story, who's never been given a chance to prove himself to his father, who is a cop, and his brother, who is a cop who gets killed in the pilot. His brother always got all the credit, kind of.

DAN: *So you've given him some personal motivation there, instead of just the chemical splash?*

Dr. Christina McGee, as played by Amanda Pays, whose previous American TV experience includes MAX HEADROOM.

DANNY: Oh, yeah. Now, will we explore whether it's kind of sick? Yeah, I think we will. A guy who wants to do that, and gets obsessive about catching guys. Yeah, we'll explore that. But is he a total sicko? No. He's a pretty personable guy

DAN: *What about, then, the element of, "Is this vigilantism, fascism?"*

DANNY: We're going to do that, too. Oh, yeah. We have an episode that's all about that, where the whole public turns against him. But ultimately it's being manipulated by a villain. And Barry actually quits. That's one of my favorite episodes.

DAN: *Strangely, I thought an interesting spin on the super-hero thing was Stephen Cannell's GREATEST AMERICAN HERO. Though it was rather camp, there were episodes — Robert Culp goes through a mid-life crisis — that were quite good, I thought.*

DANNY: Our whole visual style and everything is much more sophisticated than that show ever was. Central City is pretty wild. It's much more of its own world, a visual treat, a fantasy film than those things ever were.

DAN: *Again, you're talking about a lot of money. How did this come about? Why is CBS and everybody willing to risk so much money on this?*

DANNY: Well, CBS is spending some. But Warner Bros., because they made BATMAN, sees the commercial value in it. I don't have to convince them If it works, it works, and it'll all pay off in the end

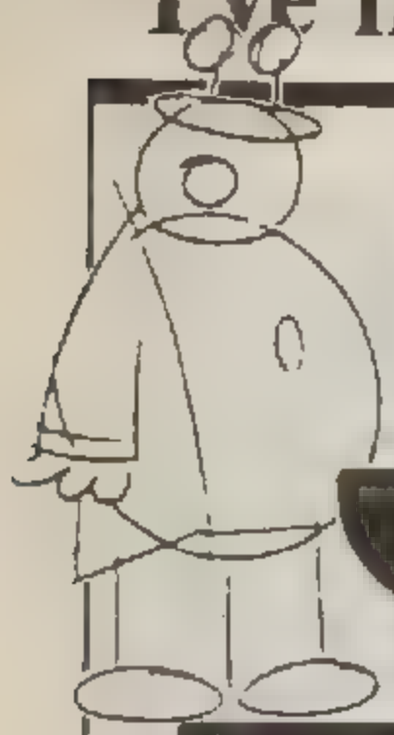
DAN: *Those super-heroes are a gold mine for Warner, aren't they?*

DANNY: BATMAN was SUPERMAN was. This one could really be a gold mine, if it works.

DAN: *I hope they're good caretakers of the characters, you know. Years ago, they were thinking, "Oh, Superman's past it, he's finished" — before they made the movie. I think those characters could carry on for a long, long time if they're treated with care.*

DANNY: I think they will. I think that right now, it's like anything else in pop culture. There's a mass audience of us who were kids and believed it. And we want to believe it as adults. And that's what this is all about.

"I've never been a great Abbott & Costello fan."



JERRY DUMAS

Had a great time with one of the unsung heroes of comic strips, Jerry Dumas, and here we go . . .

PAUL POWER: *I've just decided to turn this machine on and get started. Jerry's in the middle of telling me a story, but I think you'll be able to pick up what it's about.*

JERRY DUMAS: So the management replied to my father and said, "Sorry you did not enjoy the **Randolph Scott** movie, here are five tickets for you and your family to come to our next big hit, which we think you will enjoy." So, off we went back to the Lakewood Theater again, and this time it was **Abbott** and **Costello** in BUCK PRIVATES. And my father laughed his head off, and I enjoyed it very much. I've *never* been a great **Abbott** and **Costello** fan, but out of all the ones I've seen I think that was probably the best movie that those two guys made.

I used to *hate* all the time **Abbott** smacking **Costello** with such *viciousness* on the face — it looked like it really hurt. Usually when I would see **Charlie Chaplin** or **Buster Keaton** and they would fall down or get trampled on or fall off a building or something, I never had the sensation that they were hurt - it was like a doll falling and picking himself right up again. But when **Abbott** slapped **Costello** it really bothered me, it *looked* like he was in pain.

PAUL: *Did you ever read WHO'S ON FIRST?*

JERRY: Yes.

PAUL: *Then you know that it really was . . . if it didn't hurt him then it did hurt him, you know what I mean?*

JERRY: Yeah

PAUL: *Even if he didn't slap him that hard, he* hated *that whole insult that came from vaudeville*

JERRY: Yeah, he did, that's right.

PAUL: *It really made him crazy.*

JERRY: I just recently saw the **Buddy Hackett** and **Harvey Korman** film.

PAUL: *I like that one.*

JERRY: Yeah, I thought they did a good job, although a lot of people said -

PAUL: *Harvey Korman I didn't like in it, I thought he was wrong.*

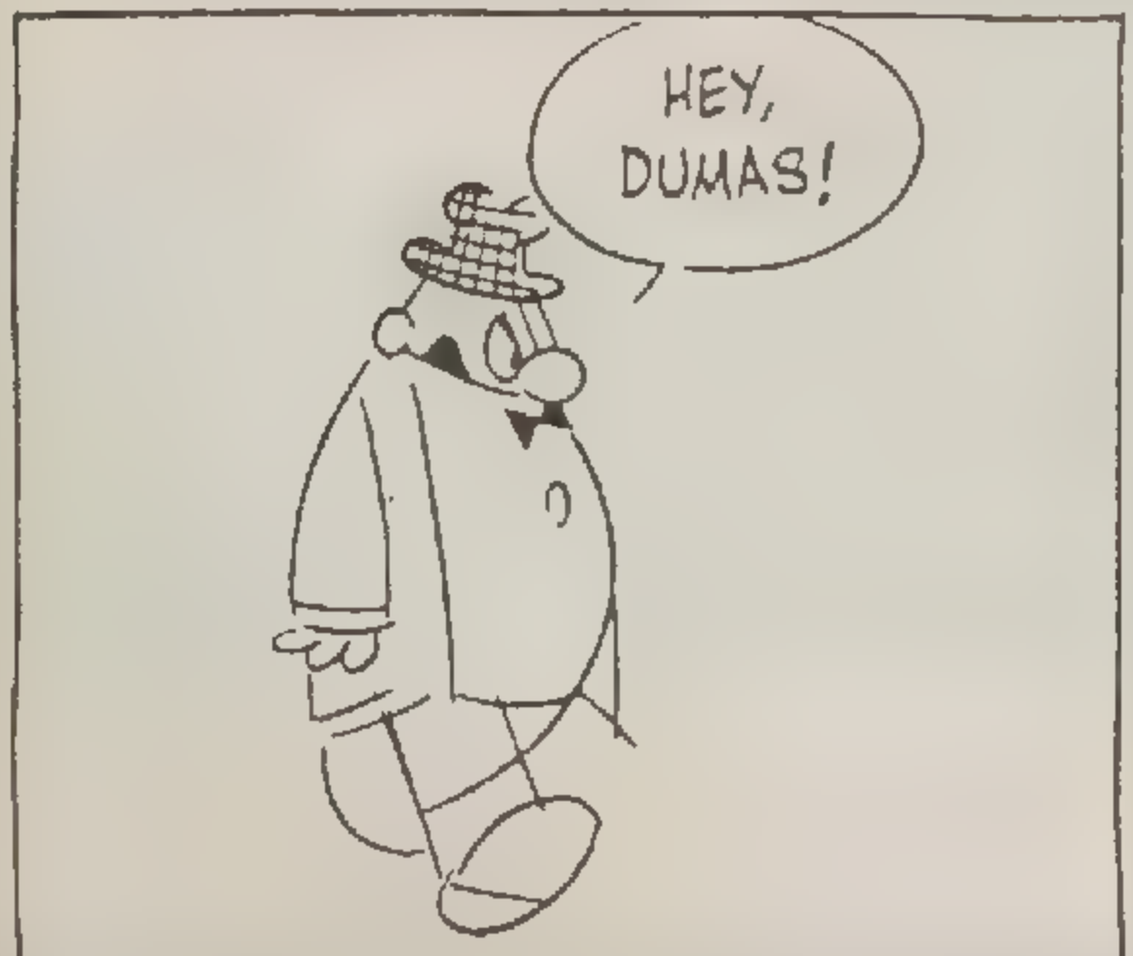
JERRY: He was wrong for it?

PAUL: *Yeah.*

JERRY: But **Buddy Hackett** was okay?

PAUL: *Yeah, Hackett was great.*

Below and scattered throughout the interview: episodes of SAM'S STRIP, by Mort Walker and Jerry Dumas.



All artwork accompanying this interview ®1990 King Features Syndicate

"Sarge doing something horrible to Beetle isn't disturbing."

BEETLE BAILEY
THIS IS A CHART ON THE HAND GRENADE I'LL DEMONSTRATE A REAL ONE LATER!
GEE IT'S GOOD TO BE A CIVILIAN AGAIN
MY! OUR SON HAS GROWN UP IN THE ARMY
OOOOOO! WHO'S THE TALL HANDSOME MAN?
THAT'S SOMB THE... BAILEY! THE FAMOUS WAR HERO!
BEETLE, YOU'RE REALLY THE BIG MAN ON CAMPUS NOW!
THEN ANSWER TO A DREAM!
HI COACH!
YOU'RE JUST WHAT WE NEED ON OUR BASKETBALL TEAM! CAN YOU HANDLE A BALL?
DUCK! THE DIN CAME OUT!
CAN I HANDLE A BALL? HA! WATCH THIS!
IN VIEW OF YOUR HEROISM, WE ARE ALLOWING YOU TO WEAR THIS GOOD CONDUCT RIBBON FOR THE DAY
OF COURSE YOU'LL HAVE TO PAY FOR THE TRASH CAN YOU BLEW UP!
JUST ONE QUESTION, COACH- DO I MAKE THE TEAM?

One of the very early appearances of Beetle Bailey by Mort Walker, circa 1953.

JERRY: I thought he was, too, especially in the scenes surrounding the death of the child. **Hackett** is quite a good actor, he's one of the *best* acting comedians.

PAUL: *He doubled for him in THE 50-FOOT WOMAN, for Lou Costello.*

JERRY: **Buddy Hackett** did?

PAUL: *Yeah.*

JERRY: I didn't know that. But anyway, that's one of the things when I do BEETLE BAILEY gags and I have Sarge doing something horrible to Beetle, to me — and to readers apparently — it isn't as disturbing as the **Abbott** and **Costello** scenes where **Abbott** was doing to **Costello** what Sarge often does to Beetle. I mean, he smacks Beetle, twists his neck, throws him on the ground, jumps up and down — you've seen those scenes where Beetle is just a mass of clothing and teeth, and blood. *(Laughter.)* Spots, we don't know what those spots all are.

Beetle is just mashed flat like a snake that has had a boulder dropped on top of it. But suddenly in the next panel Beetle's up and good as new again, just like the old ROAD RUNNER cartoons. Although sometimes people protest about the violence in comics, and the violence in BEETLE BAILEY, saying it gets too violent, I've never had the feeling that Beetle is ever in any pain. It's all "paper pain."

PAUL: *I've often wondered about that, when I've seen violence in cartoons and things. You know, from a boxing family and all of that, knowing* real *pain, and then seeing that, your terminology of "paper pain" I think is quite good. I can't see why people would really get upset by that. Do you think these are people who have never really had, like, a violent encounter?*

JERRY: Sure, that *might* be it. People get upset about the damnedest things, though. They'll get upset about drinking, that we have General Halftrack drinking martinis in the bar after work. They write in about that; there are a lot of teetotalers out there who are very *religious* about the fact, that alcohol causes traffic accidents.

When we show somebody drinking in BEETLE BAILEY, or any of the strips that I work on — once in a rare while we have it in HI & LOIS — generally the people who are drinking are not seen to be in very good control of themselves, they're seen to be rather silly and stupid. So they seem to *miss* the fact that we're using the drinking to show that you're a horse's ass when you've had four martinis. All they see is that we seem to be promoting drinking, promoting martinis. Not true, we're not.

PAUL: *They're not very perceptive, are they. How could they miss the point?*

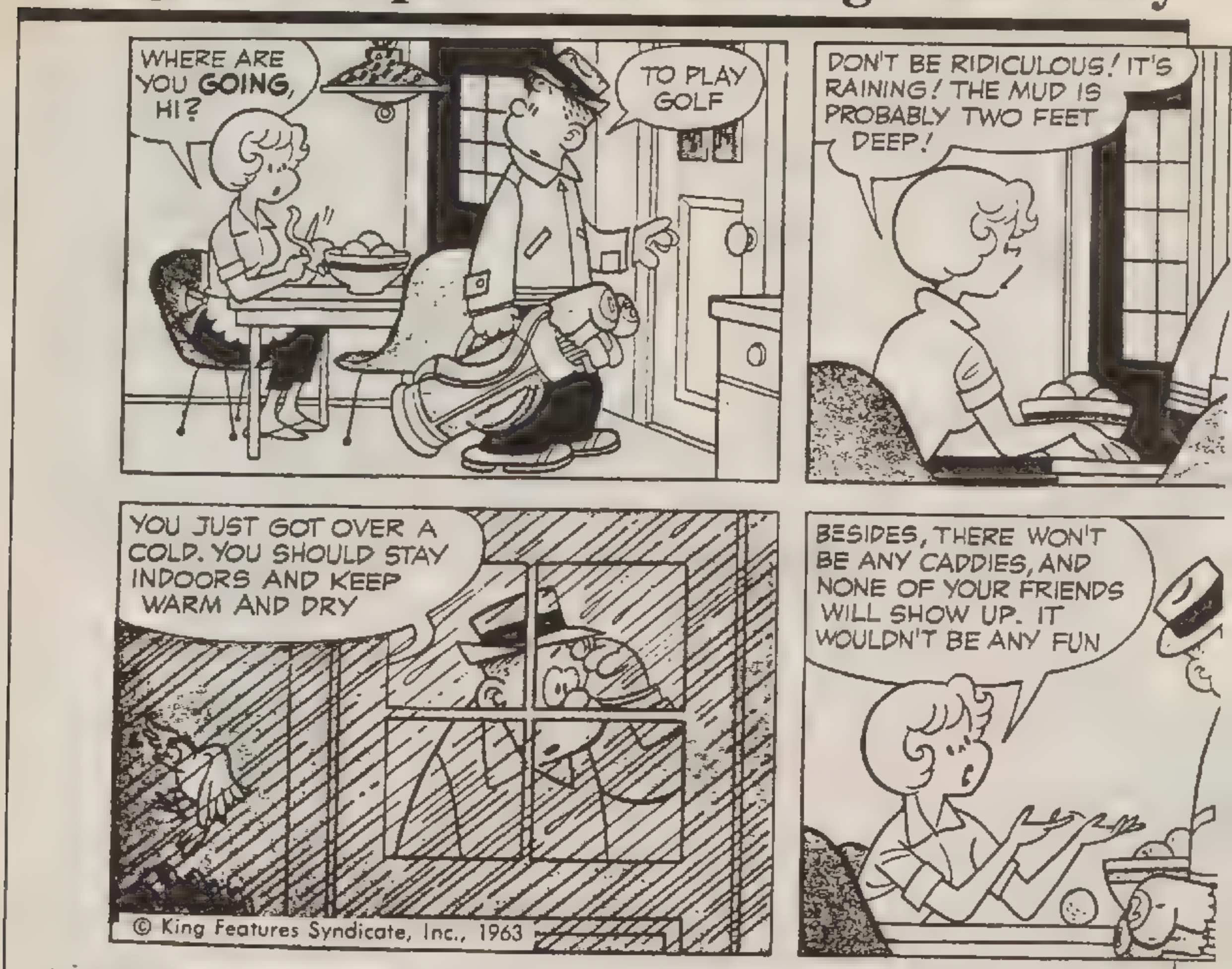
JERRY: I don't kow, but they miss the point on so many things. One time I did a gag — we had been to some dinner parties . . . you have drinks, you have a nice dinner, you have a nice evening, you go home. What happens with us is *most* of the time, 99% of the time, we go over, we have a few drinks, we have dinner, we have a few laughs, we go home.

Once in awhile you're invited to someplace where they say you will bring the salad and Marge brings the dessert and somebody else brings a main course and so on and so on. One time we had one of those deals where everybody was bringing the whole dinner from the start to finish, and Gail says to me, "Listen, there's one other thing you should know, these people are teetotalers, there won't be any drinks." And I said, "Hey, that's something, isn't it. There are not going to be any drinks, all the guests are bringing the entire dinner — what are we going to their house for? Why don't we just leave them out of this and have the damn thing at our house!" *(Laughter.)* All they were doing was supplying the room, basically.

So I did a HI & LOIS gag about this, had Hi saying, "Why don't we just leave them out of this?" Well, we got letters from teetotalers who thought that I was making fun of people who don't drink. I wasn't, I was making fun of people who throw parties and don't actually *have* the party, they're just allowing a party to be held at their house, supplied by other people. They missed the gag entirely.

And what made me upset about it was that **Dik Browne** apparently misunderstood the gag, too. He got the letters, because he drew the strip, and he wrote very nice letters saying, "Sorry — sometimes we do something wrong and we're not aware we've done something wrong, and we'll try not to do it again." Nice reply. Mort showed me what Dik had written to these people, and I said, "No no no, these people missed the gag, *that's* what Dik should have said." They missed the gag. I wasn't against teetotalers, I'm not against people who don't drink — and I'm not for people who *do* drink. The

"Sarge is the epitome of the tough old Army


WHERE ARE YOU GOING, HI?
TO PLAY GOLF
DON'T BE RIDICULOUS! IT'S RAINING! THE MUD IS PROBABLY TWO FEET DEEP!
YOU JUST GOT OVER A COLD. YOU SHOULD STAY INDOORS AND KEEP WARM AND DRY
BESIDES, THERE WON'T BE ANY CADDIES, AND NONE OF YOUR FRIENDS WILL SHOW UP. IT WOULDN'T BE ANY FUN
© King Features Syndicate, Inc., 1963

point was about these people who throw parties but don't supply anything but the place for it to happen.

PAUL: *You're going to go there, supply everything, and you're not going to have any fun as well. What's the point?*

JERRY: Yeah. Anyway, to get back to movies I'm *always* doing movie gags in BEETLE BAILEY. My God, if I've mentioned **John Wayne** in BEETLE BAILEY once, I must have mentioned him 50 or 60 times. Sgt. Snorkle is a red hot **John Wayne** fan. Sarge is the *epitome* of the tough old Army sergeant who missed out on all of the big action. **John Wayne** actually missed out on the action, too in real life. But **Jimmy Stewart** did not, and a few others did not **Tyrone Power,** I understand, was a Navy test pilot.

PAUL: *Who was that guy . . . Audie Murphy, he even got to make a movie about his own —*

JERRY: But he wasn't a movie guy who went off to war — he was a war hero who *then* became a movie hero.

PAUL: *That's right, yeah — which I think is kind of cool.*

JERRY: Yes. But anyway, I'm always doing movie gags. Beetle, Zero, Killer and Sarge walking off to the movies, going to the movies, sitting through some film, and talking about it on the way home — I've done daily gags and Sunday gags Because movies are so much a part of my life. If I weren't a cartoonist, I would like to be in the movie business.

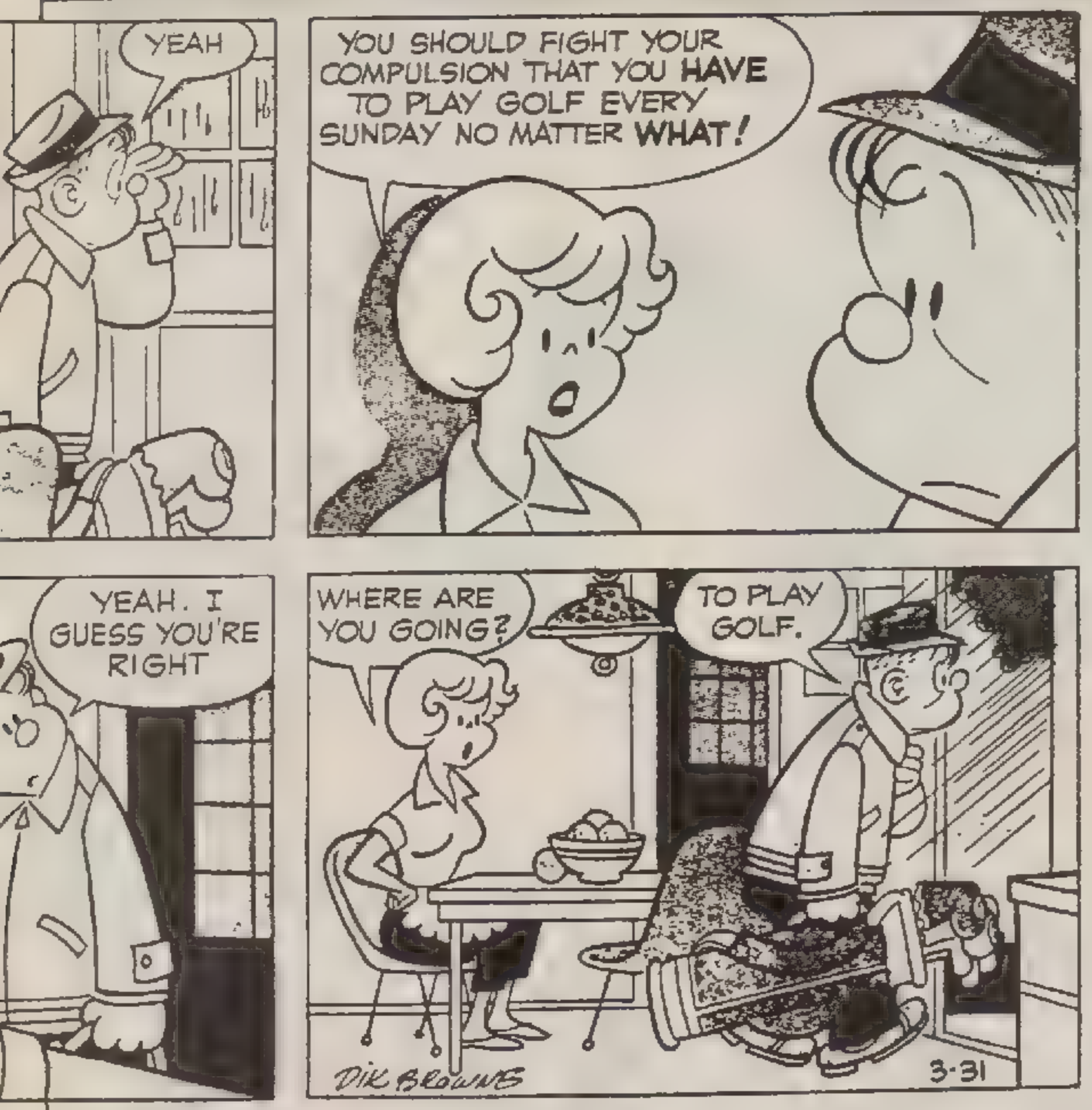
PAUL: *This brings me to the next thing. Now, I haven't seen a whole lot of SAM & SILO, I'll admit that, but what I've seen I have liked. The thing is that you seem to put more work in there, more* love *in there. Your whole layout is completely different, your whole style of composition is completely different from the other strips.*

JERRY: For years I inked BEETLE BAILEY — **Mort Walker** would pencil it and I would ink it. First I would write gags, Mort would write gags, half of the gags would be his and half would be mine, and then he would pencil and I would ink it – so I was inking in Mort's style. Now, SAM & SILO is more *my* style. Mort likes, for instance, a nice, clean line. When he draws a tree or a sleeve or pants going down to the shoes, he likes to go *sweep sweep*, a nice, clean, unbroken line with no little wavering. I've never liked that very much.

I did NEW YORKER cartoons and my *own* style, something that comes out of me, has always been a line that's a little bit broken, a little bit wavery a little bit, to me, more interesting than just a plain sweeping line. So, that's what I'm trying to do in SAM & SILO. Whatever I am is coming out in SAM & SILO, more like doing all kinds of intricate leaf treatments on the trees.

PAUL: *That one that you showed me well, it's basically a funny strip, and every now and then you would throw in something topical. What I liked about it was the coloring, the design — the whole format was like a camera panning, coming from a road, just a travelling tracking shot. And this story unfolds. The main shot, the first big panel, is really quite cinematic, and you go, "Oh, this is nice." And then when you read —*

sergeant who missed all the big action."


YEAH
YOU SHOULD FIGHT YOUR COMPULSION THAT YOU HAVE TO PLAY GOLF EVERY SUNDAY NO MATTER WHAT!
YEAH. I GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT
WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
TO PLAY GOLF.
DIK BROWNE
3-31

HI AND LOIS by Mort Walker, 1963.

JERRY: They're talking about terrorists and bombs.

PAUL: *Yeah.*

JERRY: And I did that on *purpose!* I wanted to contrast the beautiful bucolic scenery that they're driving through with the terrible things that they're talking about that are going on in other parts of the world terrible things that are going on, perhaps, in other *beautiful* parts of the world. I wanted to make that contrast. These terrorists are doing all of these horrible, ugly things, and he says, "Why are they doing these horrible things?" And Sam says, "I don't know, to make the world a better place?"

What you see in that particular strip is what's beautiful to me. My idea of beauty is a meadow with some woods behind it, a few hills beyond, the blue sky. Some people might think of grand mountains or of a lovely seascape, but to me — I spent my childhood in Canada — a beautiful scene to me will *always* be that kind of scene that I drew there.

PAUL: *You were born in Canada?*

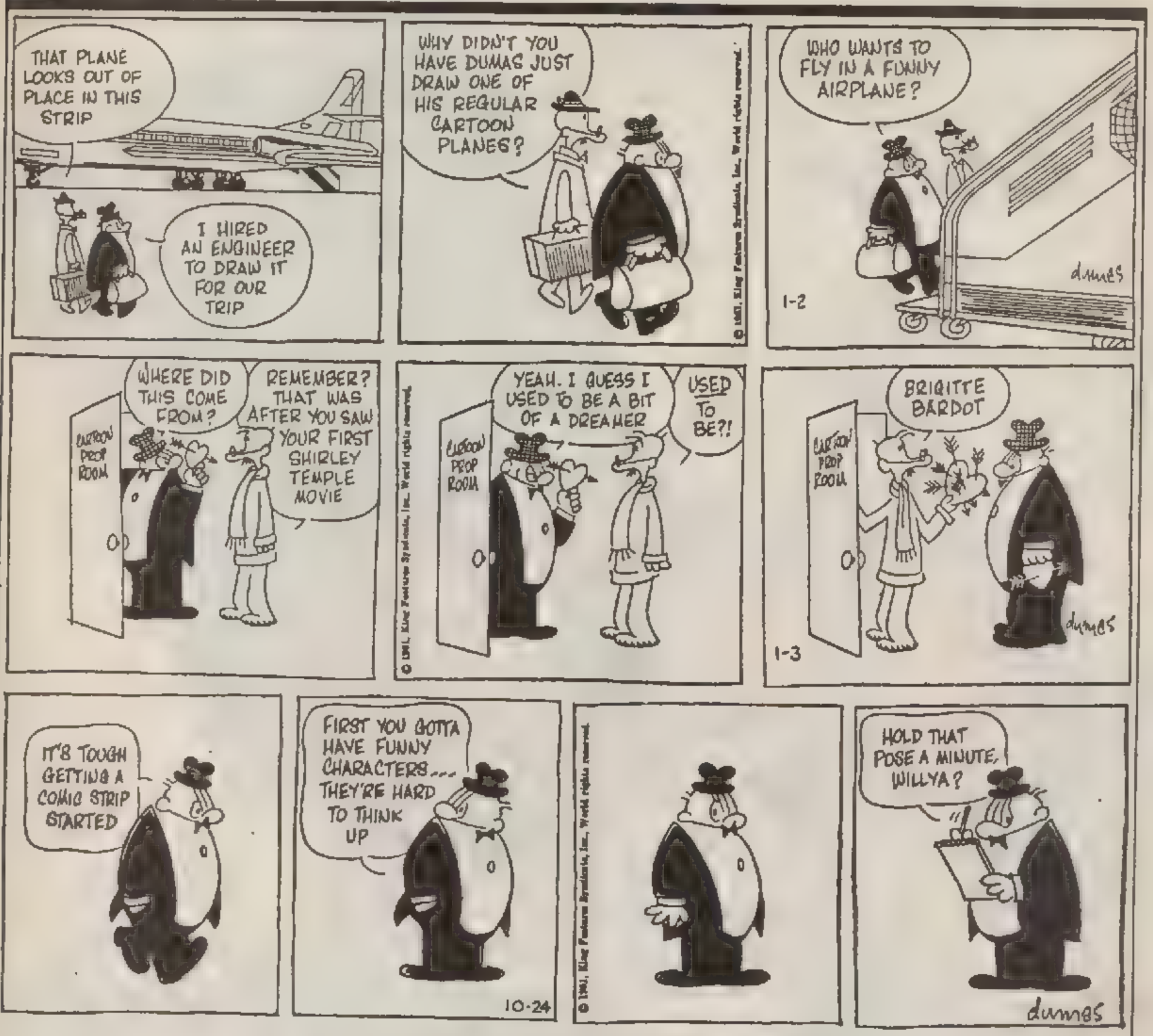
JERRY: No, I was born in Detroit, but we spent our summers in Canada at my grandparents' house in a small village 200 miles from Detroit in Ontario, a little place called Conestogo near Kitchener and Waterloo. Then later on I wrote a book called AN AFTERNOON IN WATERLOO PARK. Waterloo Park is a park that is in Waterloo, Ontario. A lot of people think that park is in Detroit, but it's not. And that scenery around there is this lovely rolling country farmland, full of German farmers.

In the 1930s it was full of horses and buggies and men plowing the fields behind huge horses, and that's what I remember, and to me that stands for peace. You'd come home at lunchtime and you'd smell the country sausage cooking — my grandmother would be cooking sausage on an old iron stove, you know, where you'd have to lift that heavy plate off with that handle. And my grandfather would be there with a long, white beard, and there was peace and there was order and there was serenity. There was no indoor plumbing, but there was a big pail of cold water that had just come from the well, three or four little tin cups hanging on hooks up above. You'd open up the lid and take a ladle and ladle the water into your cup, and drink that cold well water. It was the best drink I ever had in my life.

And then I'd eat the lunch, tomato sandwiches and sausage, brown sugar and butter on bread sliced lengthwise in strips. It was peace and security and tall hemlocks and firs and pines and white, fleecy clouds in a blue sky. There might have been terrible things happening in that village that I wasn't aware of, but everybody that I saw seemed to be very much at home. To me they'd say, "How are you today, young master Gerald?" It was like going back 200 years. It was BRIGADOON, nobody had ever been *out* of that town. I knew guys who had never been out of the village, and they were 90 years old They talked differently even when they spoke English they spoke German most of the time. And they dressed like they were from another time, another century

PAUL: *See, now, this is the sort of thing*

"The kind of movies that I always liked were the movies


THAT PLANE LOOKS OUT OF PLACE IN THIS STRIP
I HIRED AN ENGINEER TO DRAW IT FOR OUR TRIP
WHY DIDN'T YOU HAVE DUMAS JUST DRAW ONE OF HIS REGULAR CARTOON PLANES?
© 1981, King Features Syndicate, Inc., World rights reserved.
WHO WANTS TO FLY IN A FUNNY AIRPLANE?
dumas
1-2
WHERE DID THIS COME FROM?
REMEMBER? THAT WAS AFTER YOU SAW YOUR FIRST SHIRLEY TEMPLE MOVIE
CARTOON PROP ROOM
YEAH. I GUESS I USED TO BE A BIT OF A DREAMER
USED TO BE?!
© 1981, King Features Syndicate, Inc., World rights reserved.
BRIGITTE BARDOT
dumas
1-3
IT'S TOUGH GETTING A COMIC STRIP STARTED
FIRST YOU GOTTA HAVE FUNNY CHARACTERS... THEY'RE HARD TO THINK UP
10-24
© 1981, King Features Syndicate, Inc., World rights reserved.
HOLD THAT POSE A MINUTE, WILLYA?
dumas

Here and next two pages, more SAM'S STRIP by Walker and Dumas.

that I like. Here we are talking about one Sunday strip with this beautiful scenery, and now what you've given me is the true backdrop

JERRY: Where that scene came from.

PAUL: *What you really* worshipped, *what you really enjoyed, something that was very important to you. It's kind of like Orson Welles in CITIZEN KANE saying "Rosebud" and remembering the last time he ever really had a good time, the only time he ever really felt freedom. What I'm getting at, you drew here what you thought was very beautiful, this is what was beautiful for you, and then you put in this poignant statement about terrorism. What you did there was really a nice cinematic thing in a realistic background and cartoon foreground, which added even more reality to it. How many times have you done that? That's a great cinematic scene.*

JERRY: The kind of movies that I always liked were the movies that were not only funny but had a point to make. I liked silly slapstick movies just for the sheer zaniness of them, but I liked movies better that were zany, full of slapstick, but also had some kind of point to make. That's one reason, I *think,* I always liked the movies of **Preston Sturges** so much. I was a *big* fan of **Preston Sturges** — PALM BEACH STORY, SULLIVAN'S TRAVELS, UNFAITHFULLY YOURS. Another movie that I liked — and I think that this all goes into me and comes out into the comic strips — was a movie called A LETTER TO THREE WIVES starring **Paul Douglas** and **Linda Darnell.** Did you ever see that?

PAUL: *No.*

JERRY: Oh, *marvelous* film — funny stuff all the way through, but also beautiful acting. An all-star cast. **Celeste Holme** played the voice of the woman who was never seen. **Ann Sothern** was married to **Kirk Douglas. Linda Darnell** was married to **Paul Douglas.** You've got to see this movie, A LETTER TO THREE WIVES. **Joseph Mankiewicz** directed it. **Joseph Mankiewicz** is also the director of a movie on my all-time top ten list, yours too probably, ALL ABOUT EVE

PAUL: *Oh, yeah!*

JERRY: He did LETTER TO THREE WIVES, and that's why it's so good. You know, **Mankiewicz** lives only a few miles from here.

PAUL: *Have you ever met him?*

JERRY: No, but I've thought about having him over, inviting him to a party. I wonder if he would come? It would be

that were not only funny but had a point to make."

fun just to call him up — I've done this several times. **Howard Fast**, the great novelist, moved to town, and I had him over several times. The guys didn't take such a liking to him, I don't know why. We had some funny stories about movies that day, sitting right where we are here talking about the making of SPARTACUS.

PAUL: *Oh!*

JERRY: Howard Fast was sitting in the same chair you're sitting in, and he was there when they were making SPARTACUS. And I said to him, "I always loved the ending of SPARTACUS. It choked me up every time." He said, "What was that?" You remember, **Kirk Douglas,** Spartacus, is hanging on the cross, and as far as you can see *fantastic* scene, one of the best scenes ever in the movies as far as you can see down that straight road are crosses. Spartacus and all of his men are hanging from those crosses, slowly dying.

Jean Simmons, his wife, is being escorted out of the town, being driven in this chariot by **Peter Ustinov,** and she just had Spartacus's baby. They stop, she gets off, she walks up to Spartacus and her head is about at the level of his grimy feet, she looks up at him, and she holds up the baby. She says, "See, Spartacus, you have a son." And he looks down and he smiles, a few words are said, then he dies. Then **Peter Ustinov** says they have to get going, and they drive away. Great scene.

So, **Howard Fast** says, "No, that's *not* the way it ended." I said, "What do you mean it's not the way it ended?" He says, "Spartacus was killed and his body was never found." I said, "No, no, Howard. The scene is as I just described to you." He says, "No, Spartacus's body was never found, they didn't crucify him."

PAUL: *What?*

JERRY: And somebody said to me, "Jerry, you're talking to **Howard Fast.** He's the guy who wrote the novel, he's the guy who wrote the screenplay — don't argue with the author of the thing!" *(Laughter.)* And I say, "I *will* argue with him, I know what I saw." And **Howard Fast** says, "No, it never happened." All of a sudden he caught on and said, "Oh, my God — yeah. *That's* the way I ended the *book,* but we *changed* it for the movie. You're right!" *(Laughter.)* I was so glad that I stuck to my guns.

PAUL: *Now, you're an aficionado, I mean you're a fan of film. Have you ever tried to do other things in BEETLE BAILEY, like more complex drawings, moving that camera around, adding a more cinematic influence?*

JERRY: Well, no, we don't do that very much. We're not quite as static as, say, ANDY CAPP, where everything is filmed from waist level and you just see

WHAT'S THAT POUNDING ?
I CALLED SOMEONE IN TO FIX THAT STICKY WINDOW
BAM BAM
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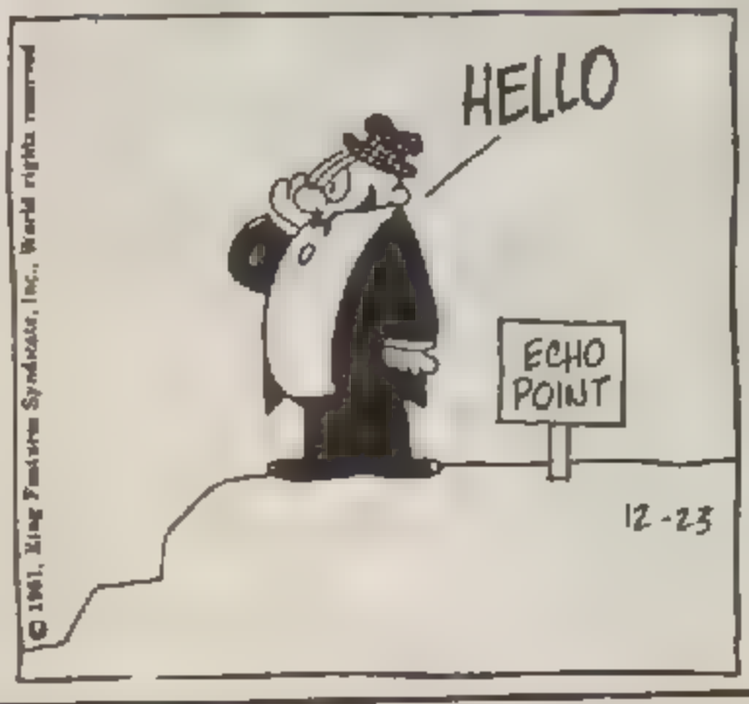

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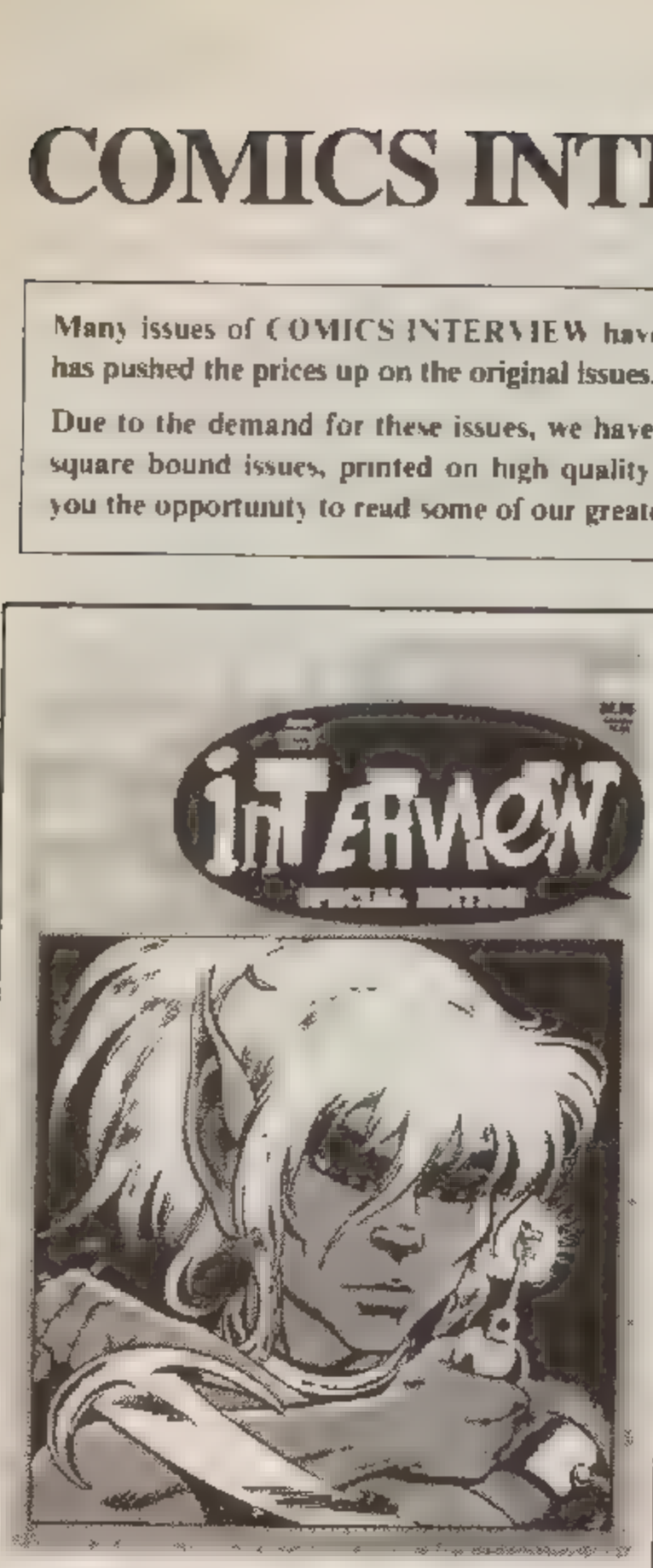
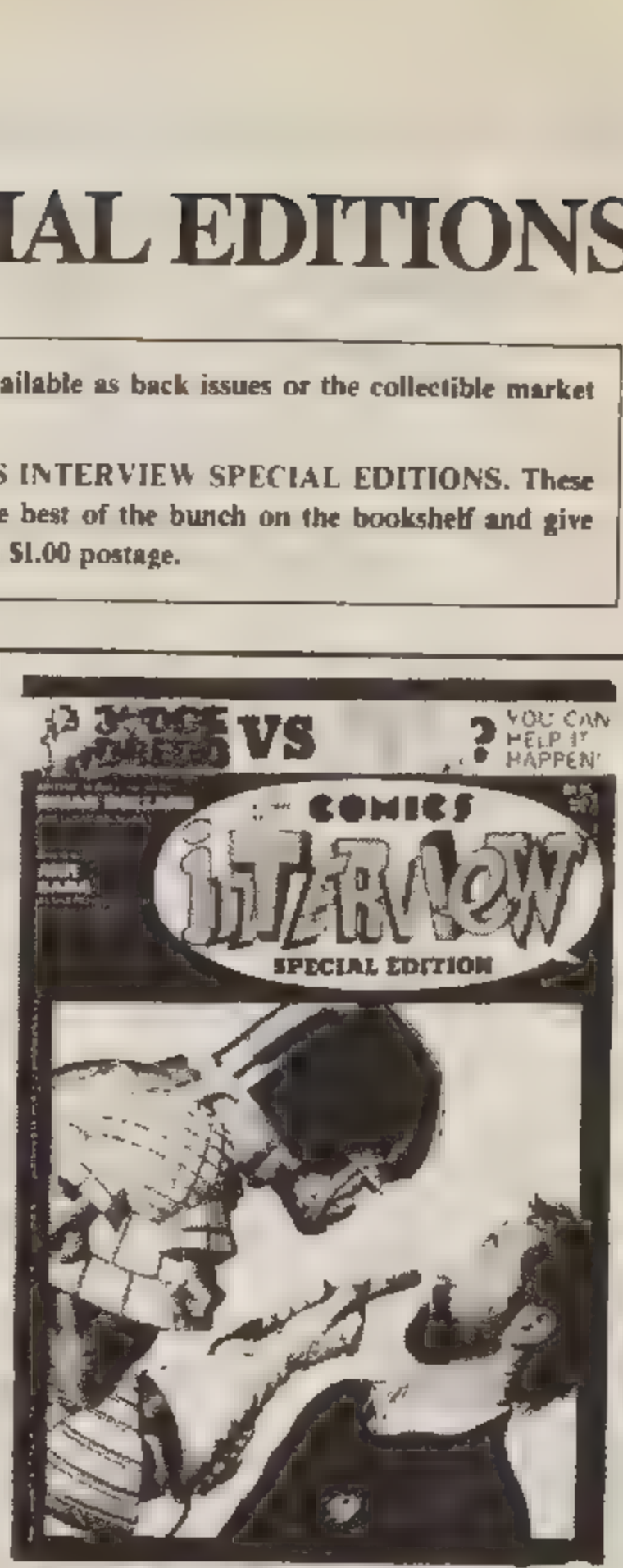
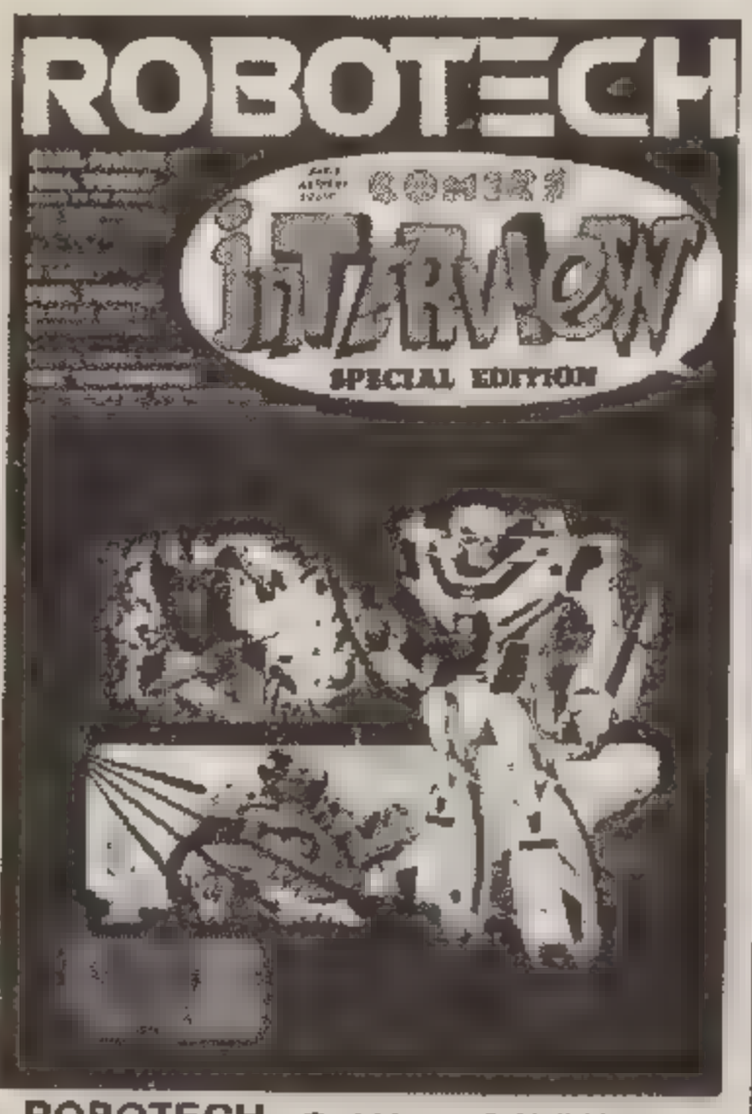


ELFQUEST. A pow-wow with the Pinis on Elfquest, the creation of an elfin world. John Costanza, letterer, tells all of being an artist. Stan Lee goes Hollywood, and the beginning of a legend now the Comico bunch, on their dreams and schemes for the future. Pini cover.

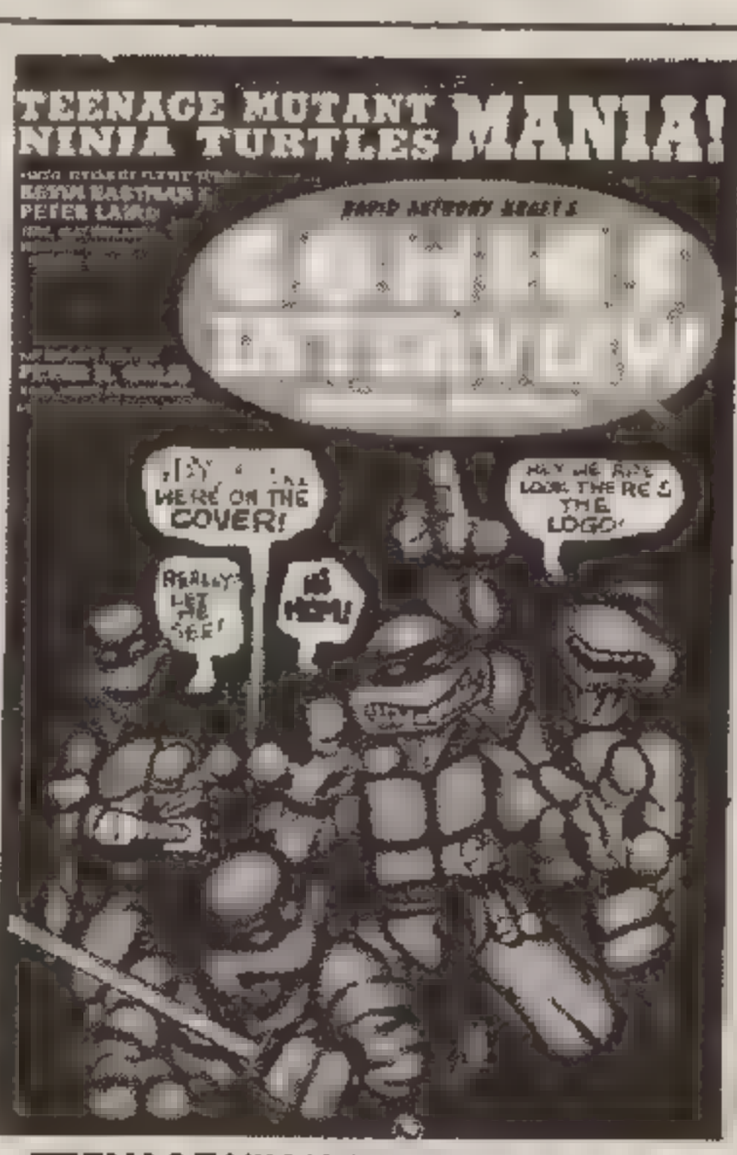
JLA-AVENGERS. George Perez and Roy Thomas tell all about a project that never saw print. Perez's never printed art, only available here! Also John Workman on Heavy Metal, Berke Breathed on Bloom County, Mike Friedrich on the biz end. Perez cover.



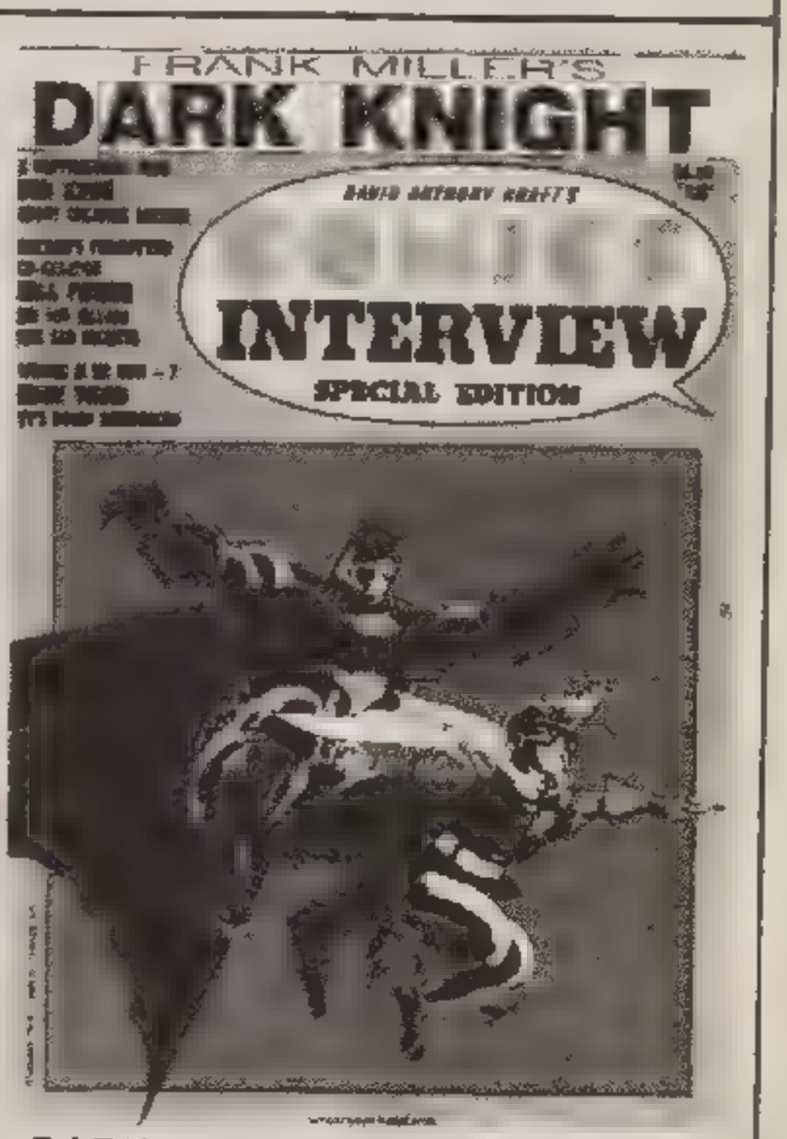
JUDGE DREDD VS BATMAN. Brian Bolland spills the beans on this project, first time round. Am Saba saddles Neil the Horse. Don and Maggie Thompson give an inside view of the Comics Buyer's Guide. Bolland cover.



ROBOTECH. Carl Macek & Neil Vokes - from TV to comics - tell why Robotech's a hit. Phil Foglio - Hugo Award winning Sci-Fi artist mumbles about Myth-Adventures, and Cat Yronwode on art for art sake and comics for comics sake More. Vokes & Rankin cover.



TEENAGE NINJA MUTANT TURTLES. Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird give it up. How Turtles Mania began..(look where it went..) Stan Drake on the colorful career of his girls, Kelly Green and Blondie. Peter B. Gillis on censorship, comedy & death! Eastman & Laird cover



DARK KNIGHT. Frank Miller expounds on his magnum opus. Fred Finger, on his father, Bill. Bob Kane, on the last 50 yrs since Bat birth. Jerry Robinson, on past memories. Burt Ward on the trouble with tights, and George Roussos on the early days. Miller cover.

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"Once in a rare while we'll do a bird's-eye view."

INTERNATIONAL COMICS WEEK
SAM, D.D YOU PROMISE TO PUT UP ANY CARTOON CHARACTERS WHO SHOWED UP FOR THE CONVENT DO?
YEAH. IF ANYONE COMES, GET OUT THE COT.
dumas 4-30
WHILE ALL THESE OLD COMIC CHARACTERS ARE HERE, I'D SURE LIKE TO USE THEM IN MY STRIP
SAM..
IT'LL TAKE SOME THINKING, BUT I CAN PROBABLY WORK THEM IN SOMEHOW
SAM...
A PERSON WITH MY INTELLIGENCE AND IMAGINATION SHOULD BE ABLE TO THINK OF SOME WAY!
dumas
I HAVE AN ANNOUNCEMENT TO MAKE
THE HOTEL WANTS ME TO REMIND YOU THAT THE CUSTARD PIES BEING SERVED ARE FOR EATING.
COMIC CHARACTERS CONVENTION
5-3

that same floorline, you know — the floorline is always parallel to the bottom of the panel. We do corner shots, and we do scenes looking out the window and then back in *through* the window from outside. A lot of times we have to turn the scene around. People who don't study comic strips don't know about this sort of thing, like you'll have two guys walking along talking, one is on the left and one is on the right, so the one on the left talks first because that's the balloon you're going to read first.

PAUL: *Yeah.*

JERRY: But in the second panel if the *other* guy is talking first, then somehow you've got to attack that panel from another angle, you've got to get around behind them. There's no way you can have him talk first without turning the camera around.

PAUL: *Right, yeah.*

JERRY: So, we have to do things like that, which is kind of cinematic I suppose. Once in a rare while we'll do a bird's-eye view of something, looking down on a scene. But that's fairly rare and it has to have something to do with the gag or there's no reason to do it; like an overall view of the whole thing.

PAUL: *Well, in SAM & SILO where you do, obviously, draw more, and you play around with things more, do you see yourself more as a director in that sense? With your own work?*

JERRY: Yeah —

PAUL: *BEETLE BAILEY is your work as well, but it's not really your strip.*

JERRY: Yeah, but when I do a BEETLE BAILEY gag, I sketch the whole thing out, and the way I sketch it out is usually the way it appears in the final drawing.

PAUL: *But what I'm getting at is there's an established formula —*

JERRY: You have to do *exactly* in the comic strip what they do in movies with the establishing shot — we *always* have to do establishing shots. That's why the first panel of almost any gag in BEETLE BAILEY or SAM & SILO or any kind of strip like that, unless it's like PEANUTS where it doesn't matter so much what the background is, the first panel is always larger. It's the establishing shot.

So, I have to show sometimes in the first panel that Sarge is talking to Beetle and that Sarge is wearing his socks, maybe that's important to the gag that he's not dressed yet. Now he's in his socks, let's say, but he's outside, so I've got to back the camera up and show full figures, not a close-up. So now we've got to move the camera back and we've got to show some buildings, maybe a jeep or two to show that they're on the base, and then I've got to show maybe that it's raining, maybe *that's* important to the gag. I've got to do that whole establishing shot.

Once I've done that, we never have to refer to that again, because the reader knows where he is, what time of the day it is, what the weather is like. And then the second panel is nearly *always* a close-up of whoever is speaking. In the first panel Sarge says something to Beetle, Beetle answers back. In the second panel only Sarge is talking — I don't have to draw the establishing shot again.

PAUL: *No.*

JERRY: Move to a close-up of Sarge —

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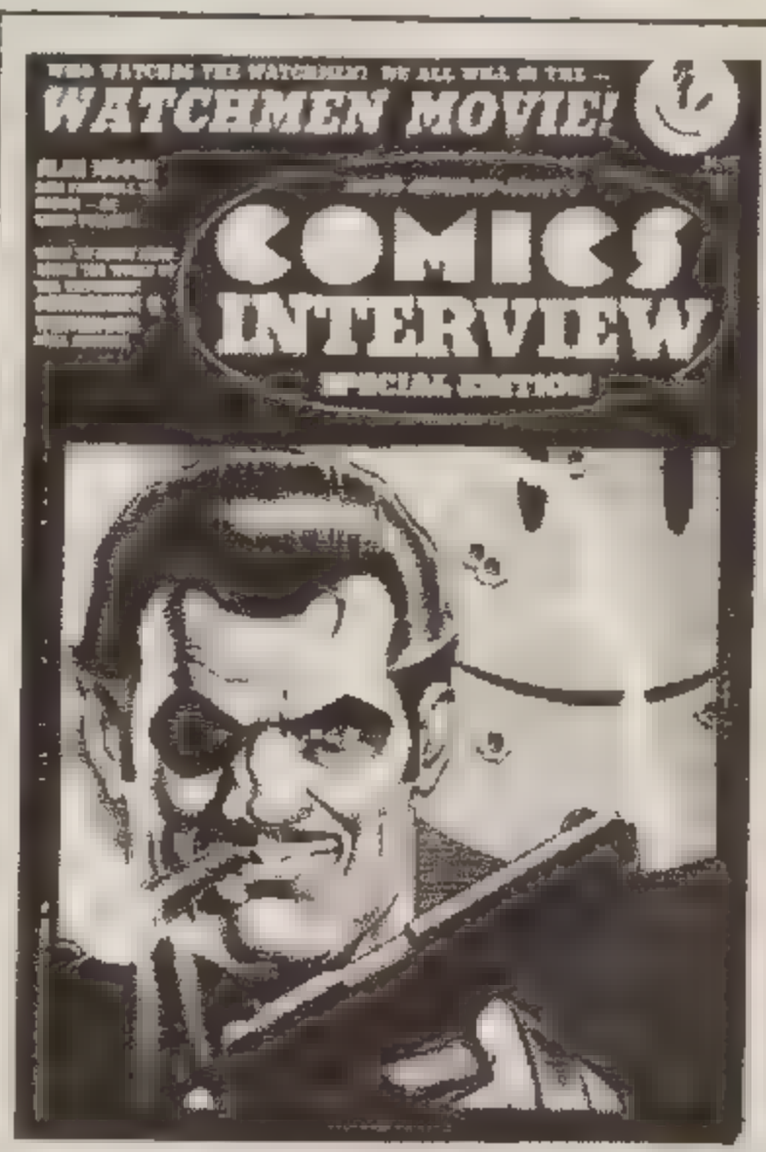
Grade: A.

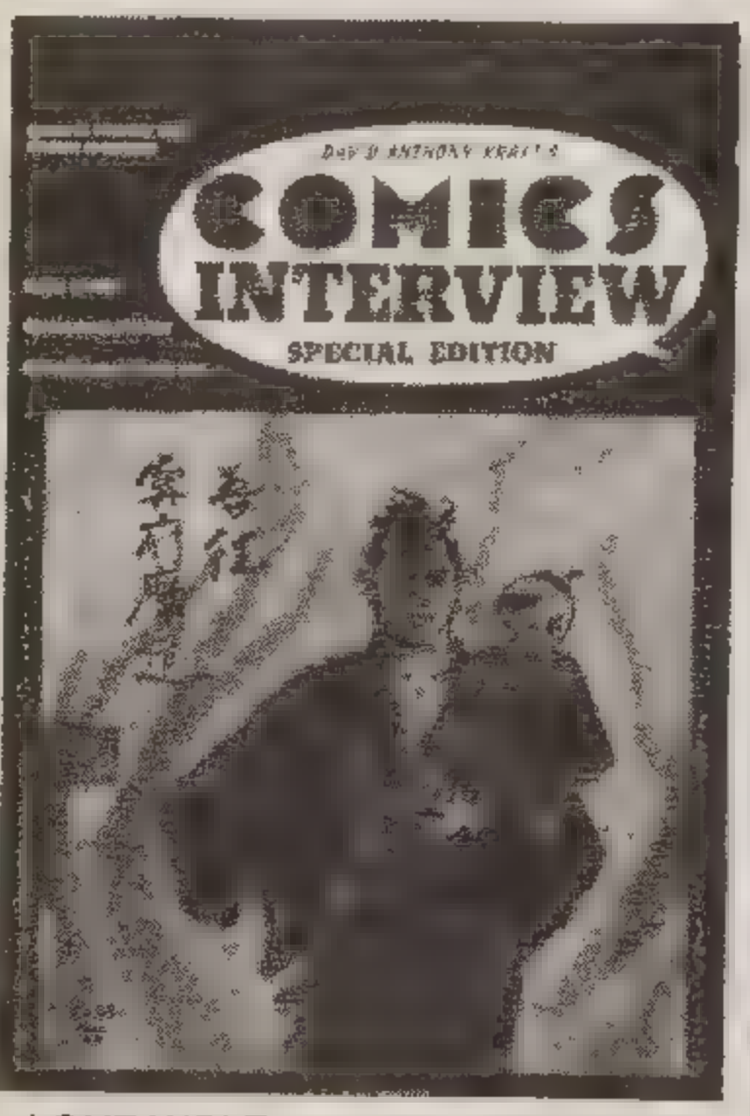
— Don Thompson
COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE

FRAZETTA. Frank Frazetta. This artist of great renown shares his thoughts on many media from comics to fine art. Frazetta cover

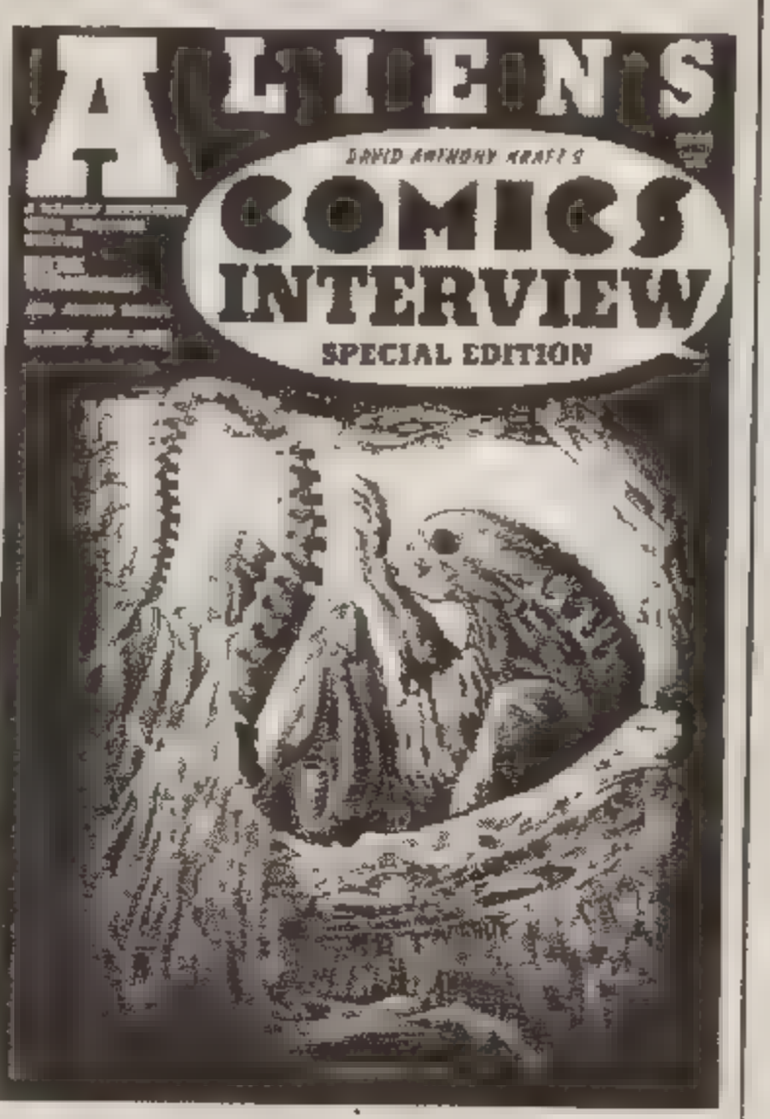
SEX & VIOLENCE IN COMICS. Frank Miller, John Byrne, Jerry Perles together with Ron Turner all expound on the limits and far-reaching effects of laws and perceptions. Plus an open forum from the star*reach Chicago trade show on the censorship theme.



WATCHMEN. Alan Moore reveals what he thinks of super heroes, and talks about his controversial creation. Daniel Greenberg and Ray Winninger on the WATCHMEN game modules. Hank Rose on the secrets of a marketeer. Dave Gibbons cover



LONE WOLF. Frank Miller speaks his mind. Kazuo Koike and Goseki Kojima, creators of a Japanese legend, in a talk from Tokyo. Plus First Comics crew Rick Obadiah, Kurt Goldzung, Alex Wald, Paul Guinan, Willie Schubert and Rick Oliver. Kojima cover



ALIENS. Mark Nelson and Mark Verheiden point out the positive and negative problems of dealing with Aliens. Mike Richardson and Randy Stradley on directing a Dark Horse, and managing freelance talent. Nelson cover

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"Readers like to get close to the characters."

COME ON DOWN, COOKIE I'M SORRY I SAID THE STEAK WAS TOUGH
COOKS ARE ARTISTS, YOU KNOW. WE'RE SENSITIVE!
I'D THINK AFTER ALL THESE YEARS YOUR FEELINGS WOULD BE A LITTLE TOUGHER THAN--
2-1
WHAT GETS ME IS HOW HE KEEPS FLUNKING THE INFILTRATION COURSE
PX
11 29
PICK UP THAT SHOVEL AND START DIGGING!
5-13
THE HECK I WILL! I DIDN'T JOIN THE ARMY TO BE A DITCH-DIGGER
A PUNCHING BAG MAYBE, BUT NOT A DITCH-DIGGER
ON STRIKE FOR MORE
2-5
I OUGHTA GO AROUND TO BIG COMPANIES AND GIVE SCOWLING LESSONS
ON STRIKE FOR MORE WORK

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker. Jerry Dumas contributed art and gags over the years.

the readers *like* to get *close* to the characters, so whenever we can we like to do close-ups. Okay, you know where we are, you know what the weather is, you know whether they're inside or outside, so now I move to a close-up. Sarge is talking, and I want you to see that Sarge is really *angry*. We get really close and we see his beady eyes and the saliva coming out of his mouth. And then in the last panel we move back to a medium shot, because now we've got to show Sarge saying something *and* we've got to show Beetle's reaction Beetle's now back in the picture again. So, yeah, the cinema really comes into it like that.

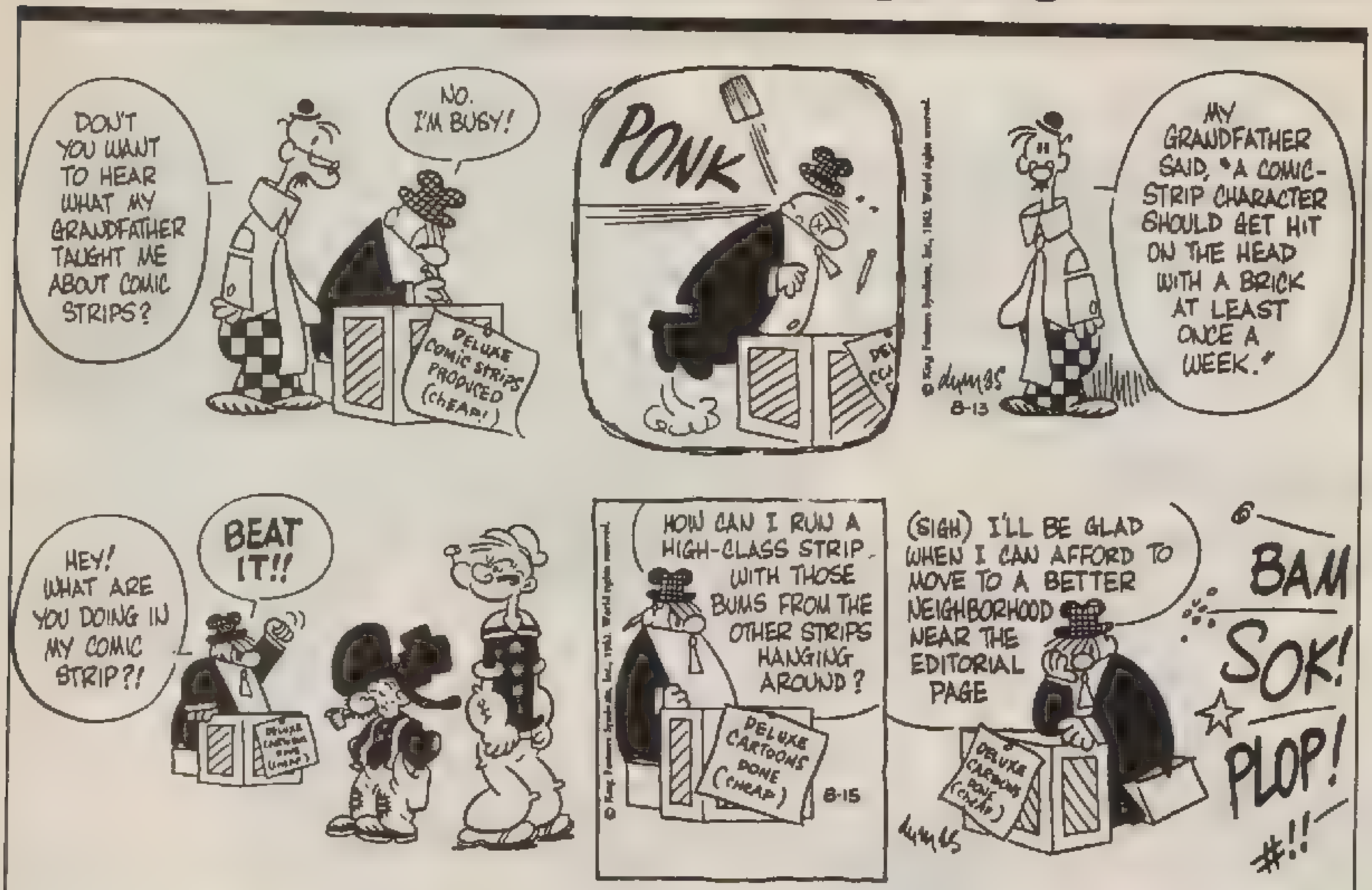
PAUL: *Do you get off on doing that when you're designing a gag?*

JERRY: What do you mean?

PAUL: *Do you really enjoy doing it?*

JERRY: Do I really enjoy doing it? *(Pause.)* I don't even think about that part of it anymore. The only thing that really makes me happy and gives me

"Thinking up a gag that'll make people laugh all over the


DON'T YOU WANT TO HEAR WHAT MY GRANDFATHER TAUGHT ME ABOUT COMIC STRIPS?
NO. I'M BUSY!
DELUXE COMIC STRIPS PRODUCED (CHEAP!)
PONK
MY GRANDFATHER SAID, "A COMIC-STRIP CHARACTER SHOULD GET HIT ON THE HEAD WITH A BRICK AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK."
8-13
HEY! WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN MY COMIC STRIP?!
BEAT IT!!
HOW CAN I RUN A HIGH-CLASS STRIP WITH THOSE BUMS FROM THE OTHER STRIPS HANGING AROUND?
DELUXE CARTOONS DONE (CHEAP)
8-15
(SIGH) I'LL BE GLAD WHEN I CAN AFFORD TO MOVE TO A BETTER NEIGHBORHOOD NEAR THE EDITORIAL PAGE
BAM
SOK!
PLOP!
#!!
IT'S FOR YOU, DAGWOOD
OKAY, BLONDIE. I'LL BE RIGHT HOME.
HOW DID SHE KNOW YOU WERE HERE?
SHE'S BEEN CALLING ALL THE OTHER STRIPS FOR TWO HOURS
8-16

satisfaction is thinking up the gag itself. Thinking up something brand new that perhaps has never been done before, a combination of words and pictures that *nobody's* ever thought of before, that will make people laugh, presumably, two or three months from now, all over the world — that's the best part of being a comic-strip artist. Sitting in that little room and thinking of something that makes *me* laugh!

I don't usually laugh hardly at all when I'm writing stuff, and neither does Mort, because it's all a very sober business. But once in awhile you think of something that's so funny that you break out laughing and you can't wait to show it to somebody. I know, sometimes, when I think of some kind of business that's going to make it a little bit *extra* funny — "Oh, God, I've really got one here!" And if I hear Mort laughing, *then* I'm in business. We show each other our gags, and we read them and can appreciate them, we can see the quality in them, but usually we don't laugh out loud. About once every three months or so I'll hear him laughing at one of my gags, and I'll know that it's a really good one — and I'll hope that it's the same one that I like so much, and it usually is.

PAUL: *To make people laugh is really the best thing, laughter is really a powerful medicine. How long have you been doing this now?*

JERRY: Well, I drew my first cartoons in high school, that was in 1947, and I've been doing them ever since.

PAUL: *Have you ever found it extremely hard to come up with any gags at all?*

JERRY: Oh, sure, yeah. It's only a momentary thing with me, when I've had like a bad day because of a late night party or lack of sleep or not feeling very well for some reason. It's never lasted more than a day or so; it's never been anything like three weeks or a month or two months or anything like that.

PAUL: *Have you got into advertising accounts as well?*

JERRY: Yeah, over the years, sometimes we will do advertising accounts — but nothing major, nothing great, nothing terribly interesting.

PAUL: *Let's cover the beginnings, how you got started in comics. From what you told me, you nearly made the trip to California and that would have been it.*

JERRY: Oh, that was just a mild thought that it might be kind of fun — I like this

world, that's the best part of being a comic-strip artist."

whole Hollywood scene. When I was 26 years old I found myself at a party with **Jesse Lasky** and some others — he was the main one I remembered because he was so nice to me. He was very old, this was 1956, and I found myself at a Hollywood party with **Jesse Lasky** and a bunch of other Hollywood moguls, directors - I don't even know who they all were. Not any actors.

I kind of liked those *old* Hollywood guys — the guys who *founded* Hollywood. I don't know whether the new Hollywood guys are so great or not, but the old ones seemed to be genuine people, you know, like the kind of guy you might find running a hardware store in your old hometown. Anyway, I thought, "Boy, I've always been interested in acting and writing, maybe I could put the two together and find a career in films." But I was in college and then I thought it would be silly - I'm about to get my Masters degree back at Arizona State — so I went back. Besides, I thought at that time that the only thing I could really be sure of doing was being a cartoonist.

PAUL: *What were you studying?*

JERRY: English literature. I got a degree in English literature at Arizona State, was working on my Masters, and then quit without getting my Masters degree because I decided that I was going to be a cartoonist or a writer anyway. After all these years in school I felt, "Oh, the hell with it." I went to school four years, got my B.A. in three years, and in my fourth year was working on my Masters. I quit without getting it because I was very anxious to get on with my life.

I'd already been in the Air Force a couple of years before college. I went in the Air Force in 1950, the Korean War started, and I got out in 1952. The end of '52 I went into college, spent four years in college, got my B.A. in '55, was working on my Masters in '56 and then quit. I needed another half a year to get my Masters degree and I decided not to do it because I was very anxious to get on with my life. I knew I didn't need that Masters degree to be a writer or a cartoonist — and I was anxious to get back to New York where all the action was, in cartooning anyway. So

PAUL: *As a writer, what did you intend on writing?*

JERRY: I didn't know, but I had always liked writing. Short stories maybe. I thought I'd get a little apartment in New York and start submitting stories to magazines, and cartoons to magazines, and sort of see what happened. That's what I was going to do. Maybe I could get a job on a magazine, THE NEW YORKER or something like that. But instead, practically right away, I found myself working for **Mort Walker.** Mort's assistant, **Frank Roberge,** whom I had known in Arizona before he came East and became **Mort Walker's** assistant —

PAUL: *You meet him in the Air Force or something?*

JERRY: Yeah, I did meet him when I was in the Air Force. Frank was a cartoonist, though, not in the Air Force. The National Cartoonists Society used to send cartooning tours around to Army bases and Naval stations and Air Force bases, and I met a whole bunch of cartoonists who came to the base

PAUL: *Who?*

JERRY: Oh, like **Bill Holman,** who did SMOKEY STOVER, and **Dale Messick,** who did BRENDA STARR, and a bunch of illustrators, **Arthur William Brown** and **Thornton Boots,** the SATURDAY EVENING POST cover guy. A whole bunch of them, there were about 30 or 40 of them. **Frank Roberge** was then **Dale Messick's** assistant on BRENDA STARR. I was in the PIO, Public Information Office, and I was assigned to be with the cartoonists and illustrators, help them out, escort them around, take them here and there. And movie stars came and I did that with them, too. I can remember meeting all kinds of great old movie stars who sort of didn't have much to do except go around to Air Force bases. *(Laughter.)*

But anyway, **Bill Crawford** came once, and I grabbed him — I had admired his stuff from afar — and I said, "I'm a cartoonist, would you like to see my stuff, I've got my cartoons over here." So, *very* reluctantly he walked with me, he thought he was stuck! *(Laughter.)* I had a whole album of stuff that I had done since I was in high school, and I was the cartoonist for the Air Force paper, and I had been studying everybody, studying *all* the great cartoonists, and I was getting pretty good. And here I was, a 20-year-old kid in a uniform, so he walked with me and he was kind of grumpy and unpleasant, this big silver-haired guy. I finally got him over there and he looked at my stuff, and he says, "Oh, yeah, hey, this isn't bad! Hey, kid, you're all right!"

Then he was kind of all right. But he thought he was on a wild goose chase and was missing his second martini. Later on I used to see **Bill Crawford** all of the time, and he never remembered me. I used to talk with him, he never had any idea that I was the same kid who dragged him away that day. I think he finally got Alzheimer's, the last time I saw him was very tragic. He was so nice, but he didn't have the faintest idea who I was or where he was

PAUL: *Oh, that's terrible. That's a horrible disease.*

JERRY: Yeah. I was so upset when I found out that **E.B. White** had it, too. But anyway, so then I came East and **Frank Roberge** was leaving to start his own strip, Mort needed somebody. In Phoenix I had just read an article on

"My fondest wish would be to write a screenplay"

LOOK! REAL PEOPLE!
THE FIRST ONES WE'VE SEEN SINCE ALICE!
10-3
dumas
HOW DID THEY GET HERE? I THOUGHT WE BOARDED UP THAT RABBIT HOLE!
IT ALL STARTED WHEN WE MADE A WRONG TURN OFF THE TURNPIKE
HAVE AT YOU
IGNATZ! TAKE YOUR BRICKS AND GO SOME-PLACE ELSE!
!/ POW
ZIP
10-4
YOU JUST MESS THE WHOLE PLACE UP WITH ALL YOUR BRICK-THROWING!
AND TAKE YOUR SHADING WITH YOU!
THIS COMIC STRIP UNFAIR TO SKILLED MICE
OKAY, IGNATZ! I'LL MEET YOUR DEMANDS. CALL OFF THE STRIKE
THIS COMIC STRIP UNFAIR TO SKILLED
10-5
IT'S THESE FRINGE BENEFITS THAT ARE HURTING EMPLOYERS
POW
ZIP
dumas

BEETLE BAILEY, and I hadn't seen it before BEETLE BAILEY was only six years old then, but it was a pretty nice hit, was in about 400 papers or so. It mentioned Frank was Mort's assistant. I'd been calling Frank's house while I was in college, then suddenly he just picked up and left, just disappeared. Two years went by. I thought, "What the hell did Frank ever leave for without telling me where he went?" I thought I'd never see him again. Then I pick up this magazine and read that **Frank Roberge** is writing gags and doing backgrounds for BEETLE BAILEY.

So I wrote a postcard to Frank care of **Mort Walker's** house, said, "Dear Frank, remember me, **Jerry Dumas?** I know you do, we spent so many wonderful times together. I'm coming East to become a cartoonist.

Two days later I get a phone call from Frank, he says, "You won't believe this, but for two years while I've been working here with Mort I've been telling Mort about you. I've been telling him, 'There's this terrific kid who draws funny and writes funny, and he's really great. And he's got the military background. If ever I leave, there's this kid out in Arizona who would be perfect for BEETLE BAILEY' And you wouldn't believe it, I'm leaving. And just this morning we came down from the studio, we were having lunch, and Mort said to me, 'Listen, we've got to look into finding this kid that you used to know in Arizona.' I said, 'Jesus, Mort, that was two years ago, he could be anywhere in the world, I have no idea how to go about finding Jerry.'" Then they brought the mail in and there was that postcard from me. *(Laughter.)* So I just fell right into it.

PAUL: *Wonderful!*

JERRY: It's the old line you hear about how you've got to be *lucky!* **Spencer Tracy** used to say — getting back to movies he said, "When I was coming along, trying to get going as an actor, I knew 50 guys who were just like me. They talked like me, they looked like me, and they were just as good actors as I was. Why did I, **Spencer Tracy,** make it, and the other 50 guys didn't make it? Well, I had a couple of breaks, I was in the right place at the right time. Those guys were trying hard, I was trying hard; I made it, they didn't. You've gotta be good. You've gotta have the breaks, but you gotta be good when the breaks come."

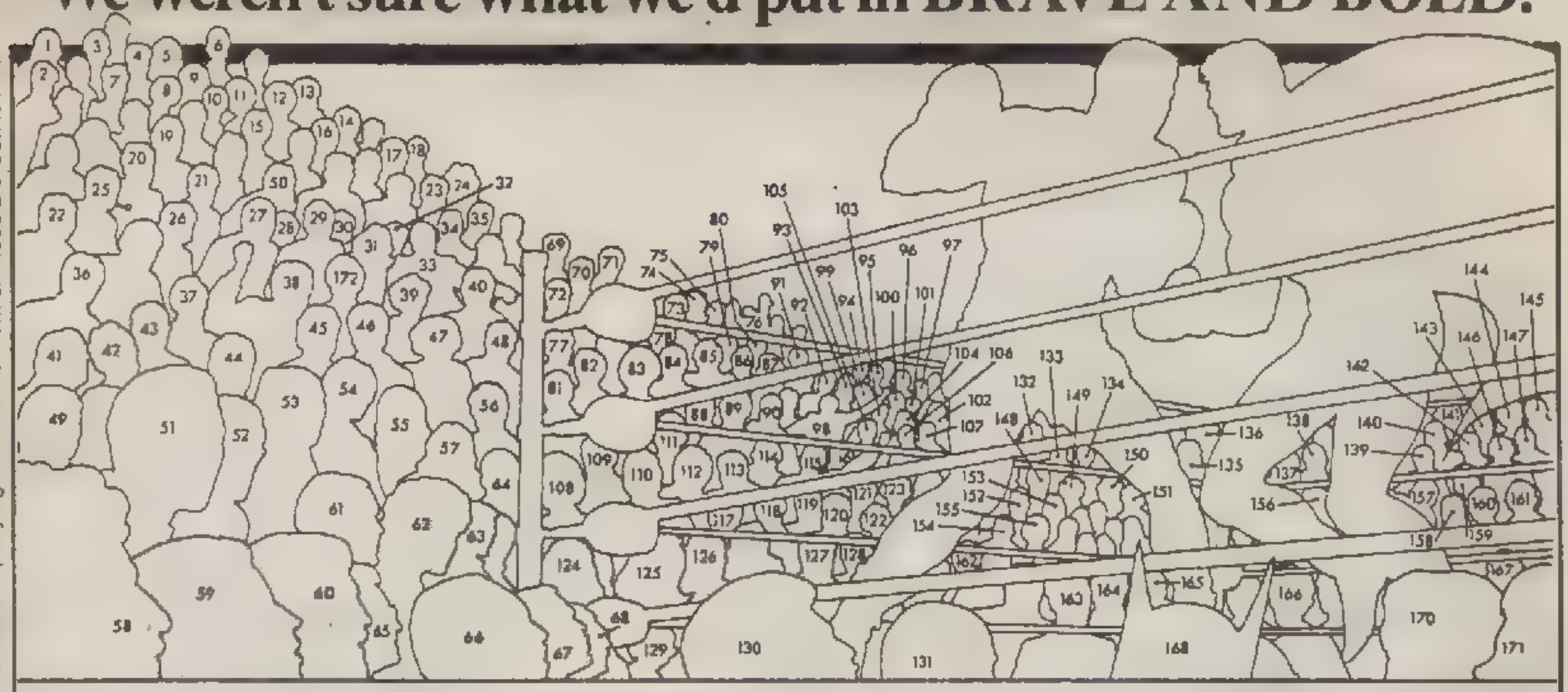
PAUL: *Absolutely, absolutely.*

JERRY: You've got to be good

PAUL: *And the area you're working in, realistic cartoonists would say, "Well, that funny stuff is easy." No, it's not, because it's a whole other way of thinking. If anything, you're coming even closer to something emotional in the impressionistic cartoon style.*

JERRY: Yes. My fondest wish would be if somebody would say to me, "Jerry, write a screenplay." That, to me, would be absolute heaven. I might have two or three false starts, or I might come out with two or three screenplays. All I need is six months with no worries about money, with no worries about time; just six months to come up with something. I've got about five or six ideas that I think would be pretty nice movies.

"We weren't sure what we'd put in BRAVE AND BOLD."



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Among the above you will find Mr. Schwartz at the 81 position — now try to find him in the following two pages.

JULIUS SCHWARTZ

When SUPERMAN #411 (September 1985) rolled off the presses, Julius Schwartz got into the history books. He was in them already, but that may have been the only time in the history of comics that an editor had nothing to do with preparing a book he would be credited with having edited. Elliot Maggin, Curt Swan, Murphy Anderson, John Costanza and Gene D'Angelo, aided and abetted by Dick Giordano, Paul Levitz, Pat Bastienne and Bob Rozakis, went behind Julie's back to prepare a special story for that issue as a surprise for his 70th birthday — and "The Last Earth-Prime Story" guest starred SUPERMAN's veteran editor (so he had something *to do with the book).*

Of course, this was but one of many high moments in a long and honored career which also included his appearance in that classic first Earth-Prime story back in FLASH #179 (May 1968).

Julius Schwartz came to comics in 1944 from the world of science fiction — a man named Ray Bradbury probably remembers him — and would be responsible for many of the creations and recreations which would cement DC's position as a giant in the industry. A list of his achievements would be impressive, and very very long — so let's meet the man whose imagination never died . .

RENEE WITTERSTAETTER: *What I want to talk about first are some of the books you edited at DC. Can you tell me about what your part in the BRAVE AND BOLD series was, when you first got involved in it?*

JULIUS SCHWARTZ: Well. **Bob Kanigher** and I coedited the book. He took care of some of the stories and I took care of the others, but *which* ones we did I don't recall offhand. He wrote Robin Hood, so I must have been involved in editing, or script editing at least. And Golden Gladiator, that was done with **Russ Heath** . . . but I've forgotten who wrote them.

RENEE: *Bill Finger.*

JULIE: Bill Finger wrote those?

RENEE: *Yeah.*

JULIE: He couldn't have written all of them — well, maybe he did.

RENEE: *What were your contributions to BRAVE AND BOLD?*

JULIE: I think I thought up the title. I'm not sure of that. We had a *hard* time coming up with a title because we weren't even sure what we were going to put in the magazine. How we came up with — when I say "we" it might have been **Kanigher** or me, we worked in the same office —

RENEE: *What was that like, working together in the same office?*

JULIE: I would hate to say in *print* what it was like. *(Laughter.)* What Bob would do once in awhile, I'd be plotting a story with **Gardner Fox** and he'd say, "Boy, that's a good gimmick, *I'm* going to use it in WONDER WOMAN!" And I would be very helpful to Bob on METAL MEN, because I'm a major in science and he needed my help. Metal, he had to know the various properties and strengths and weaknesses. I had a book called SCIENTIFIC ENCYCLOPEDIA and we would refer to that. He would often ask a question — this has nothing to do with BRAVE AND BOLD —

RENEE: *That's fine.*

JULIE: If he was writing a science-fiction story, he wouldn't realize that on Mars you couldn't breathe the air because there wasn't much of it, or if you're on the Moon you can jump six times as high as you could on Earth — he was not that knowledgeable about science, so he depended on me for his science elements in his stories

RENEE: *Could you talk about the differences between being an editor today and being an editor then?*

JULIE: Sure, I'd be glad to. When I was hired I was hired as the story editor. In

"Back in the Golden Age of the '40s, a writer would

those days, back in the Golden Age of the '40s, a writer would come in and we'd *plot* the story from beginning to end. It's not like writing for pulp magazines where you sit down and write a story and send it out to market, and it would be rejected because it was the wrong length or it was the wrong type of story or so on. When a fellow plotted a story with me, it was *accepted!* There might be some revision which either he or I would do, but there was no writing the story blind. We knew beforehand what the plot would be

That doesn't mean we ironed out every little panel. Sometimes a fellow like **Bill Finger** would like to work backing out of the trap himself — we'd back him into a trap and he'd work it out. In the case of **Gardner Fox,** he'd come in at 9:15 and we'd have an assignment of a story to think of — or even *better,* I would tell him a cover. See, the difficulty was when we did the artwork, sometimes we'd finish the book and we'd look for a cover scene and there was nothing *dramatic* enough. I have no hair because I tore it out! *(Laughter,)* So I came up with a better idea of doing the cover first, a very dramatic scene, usually an emotional scene. And Gardner would come in, or **John Broome** or **Bill Finger** or whoever, and I'd say, "This is the cover idea, we've got to figure out how to get this in a story."

Let me give you an example: One of the successful BATMAN covers I did was Batman was leaving Gotham City and the people were throwing eggs and tomatoes at him, he was in *disgrace!* We called the story "The Fallen Idol of Gotham City." So we had to figure out a story of what Batman had done to warrant such a treatment. The most successful one I did was a FLASH cover. **Carmine Infantino** or **Gil Kane** and I would sit down and we'd come up with ideas; sometimes we'd get nothing, sometimes we had a half a dozen ideas in an hour. In this particular case it was a FLASH cover that showed a dramatic close-up of the Flash holding up a hand to the reader as if he was a traffic cop, and there was a big balloon that said

Script based on an original story by: Denny O'Neil
Adapted By: Neal Adams
Penciller: Neal Adams

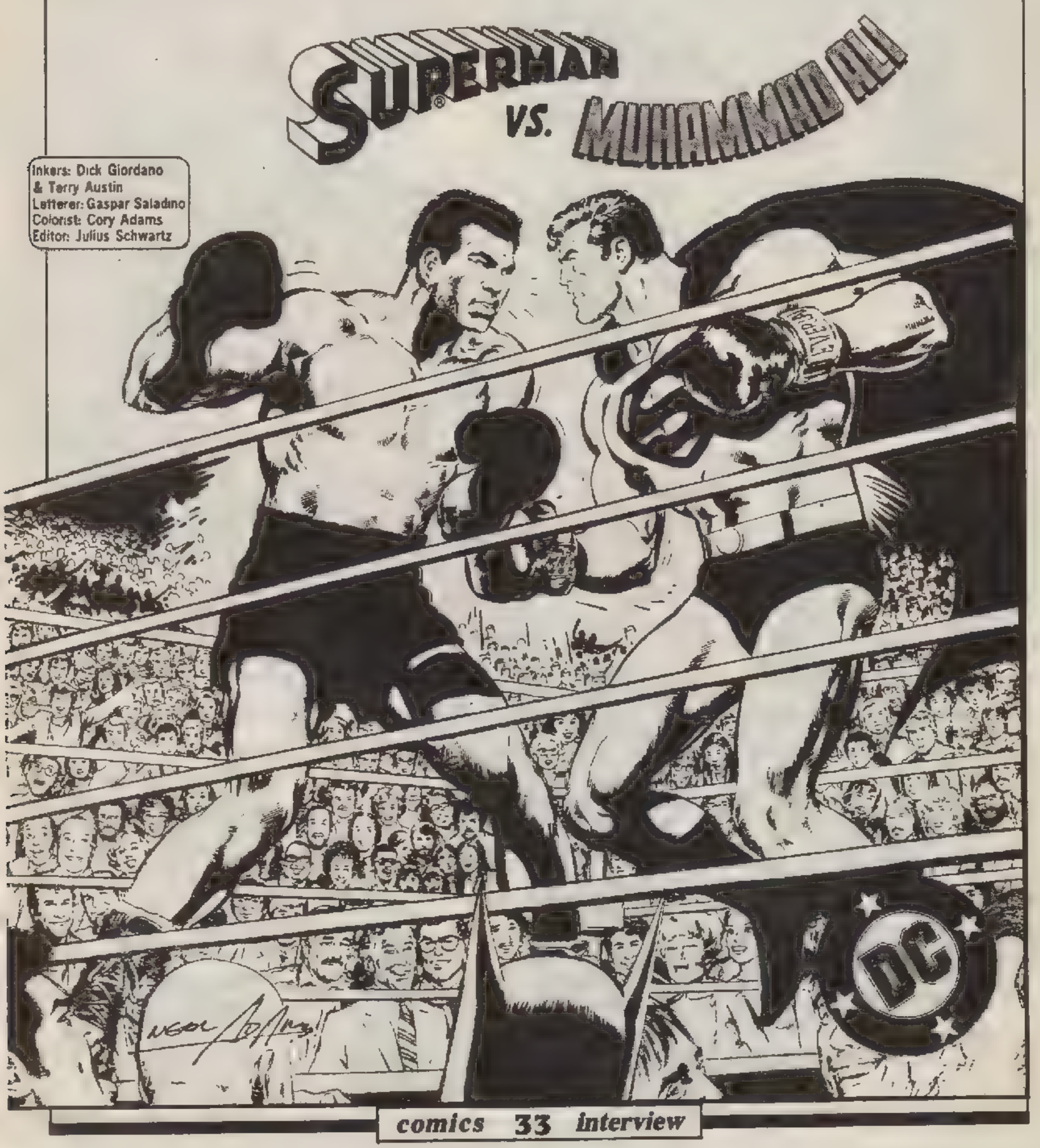
come in and we'd plot the story beginning to end."

something to the effect, "Stop! Don't pass this magazine by, my life depends on it!" And then we had to figure out how a situation like that ever arose

But at least we had something to work on, you see. All too often Gardner came in and would say, "Well, let's do a Joker story." "There's been a lot of Joker stories, do you have a specific idea to work on?" A dramatic one that I remember is I thought of a switch where I introduced a villain called the Block-buster. He could easily handle Batman but he couldn't handle Bruce Wayne, Bruce Wayne was too tough for him. How could a situation like that be, Batman *is* Bruce Wayne? And your mind starts working. Every story I ever did was plotted, with two *exceptions* — I don't know if this is of interest to you.

RENEE: *Sure*

JULIE: A story came in, I didn't know who he was but he did a story cold without my having any idea of the plot, and I bought it — only two cases. One was by **Elliot Maggin** who wrote a Green Arrow story. He was going to Brandeis University, I guess it was a project that he did, and it was a little too long but he cut it down. I couldn't believe it was so good! I handed it around the office and said, "Read this story. Is it really as good as I think it is?" And everyone agreed. By some chance it fell into the hands of **Neal Adams**, and **Neal Adams** said, "No one is doing this story but me!" And he did it.



"Irwin Donenfeld said, 'DC is not doing

The other one was a case of a fellow who was a graduate of the **Joe Kubert** school, his name is **Craig Boldman.** He wrote a Jimmy Olsen story — well, it was a Superman story featuring Jimmy Olsen. It was so great that I *took* it! And those are the only two cases that I can think of in which scripts came in by the mail. We'd get dozens and dozens of story ideas, and whole stories written, and they'd always be rejected.

RENEE: *Did you get a lot of submissions back then?*

JULIE: Yeah, quite a bit. My favorite submission was a fellow who was going to high school and said, "I am doing a project on the history of comics, would you please answer the following 40 questions." *(Laughter.)* I would write the essay for him, wouldn't I? We invariably had mail both from people who wanted

The very first story sold to DC by Elliot Maggin that Julie spoke of.

more than one gorilla cover a month!"

to write for us or people who wanted information about comics in general I think **Mark Waid** started that way with me.

RENEE: *You've probably told this story 100 times —*

JULIE: Let's make it 101. *(Laughter.)*

RENEE: *Would you tell me about the gorilla covers again!*

JULIE: That's a very interesting story. I had a science-fiction magazine called STRANGE ADVENTURES, an anthology magazine, four stories an issue. You must realize — it was a monthly magazine — over the course of the year we had to do 48 science-fiction stories, so I had to think - along with the writers, of course — of 48 stories a year. Well, STRANGE ADVENTURES was selling slightly above average. The editor director was **Irwin Donenfeld,** the son of **Harry Donenfeld** who was the original president and founder of DC Comics. He said, "STRANGE ADVENTURES leaped up ten points, a *fantastic* rise! Why? What happened?"

In those days all magazines were sold on the newsstand, there were no direct sales, so if a cover was good enough readers would pick it up. So we looked at the cover which showed a gorilla in a cage in a zoo. The people outside the cage were looking in at this gorilla, and this gorilla had a slate in his hand and he had written in chalk, "Please help me, I am the victim of a horrible scientific experiment."

RENEE: (Laughter.)

JULIE: You snicker a little bit, but if you saw that and you were eight to ten years old - which was the average age of the reader at that time - you picked up the magazine to find out what happened to this presumably human being who turned into a gorilla, a victim of a horrible scientific experiment. So we tried to figure it out, and I said, "Well, the way I see it is the issue went over well because the gorilla was acting like a human." And every gorilla cover I did from then on was not a *straight* gorilla cover, he was acting like a human.

RENEE: *Did you do a lot?*

JULIE: Did a *lot*, so much that *every* editor wanted to do it. **Irwin Donenfeld** at that point said, "DC is not doing more than one gorilla cover a month!" *Everyone* wanted to do a gorilla cover! And I did other variations, for instance I had Gorilla Grodd in THE FLASH, and that was quite effective. He acted like a *super*-human

RENEE: *Did you have a gorilla cover in BRAVE AND BOLD?*

The Flash's arch-foe, Gorilla Grodd. Artwork by Infantino.

JULIE: That I don't recall, so I would doubt it. But I had many in STRANGE ADVENTURES. I had *flying* gorillas! Superman could fly thorugh the air, Hawkman with wings could fly through the air, so why not a gorilla? And talking about science fiction, we had another gimmick that always always sold well, another cover along similar circumstances as the gorilla. Sold way above average so we looked at the cover, and it was something about the Earth . . . I can't remember, but it was *not* like an ordinary Earth scene. To give you what happened later, **Joe Kubert** did a beautiful cover of a sword slicing the Earth in two. Another cover I think Joe did, a traveler had just come back to Earth from an outer space expedition, and there were two Earths there — *two Earths* exactly alike! One was obviously the real Earth, one *must* have been the real Earth, and one was the counterfeit Earth, and the spaceman was given the information that if he landed on the counterfeit Earth he would blow up the real Earth, but if he could figure out which was the real Earth then nothing would happen.

That was a story in which I had to use my scientific background, and I vaguely recall **Gardner Fox,** or maybe **Otto Binder,** wrote it. Those were the types of covers we wanted. *Anyone* could do a cover where the hero is slugging the villain, it doesn't mean a thing. Other favorite covers — I don't know why I should tell all this, tell Marvel, what always sells well. *(Laughter.)* What always sells well is when a hero fights a duplicate of himself. A surefire hit - this was done so many times that everyone knows about it now — if on one side of the cover you see all of the super-heroes, on the other side of the cover you see the super-villains, and they're about to clash.

RENEE: *Yeah*

JULIE: Yeah, you've seen that. As a matter of fact, Irwin not only figured out covers but he would figure out *trends.* He would make graphs on all newsstand sales, plot January through December, and make an analysis: this would be spring, this would be summer, like that. All magazines started to go down at one point and we all thought about it — it

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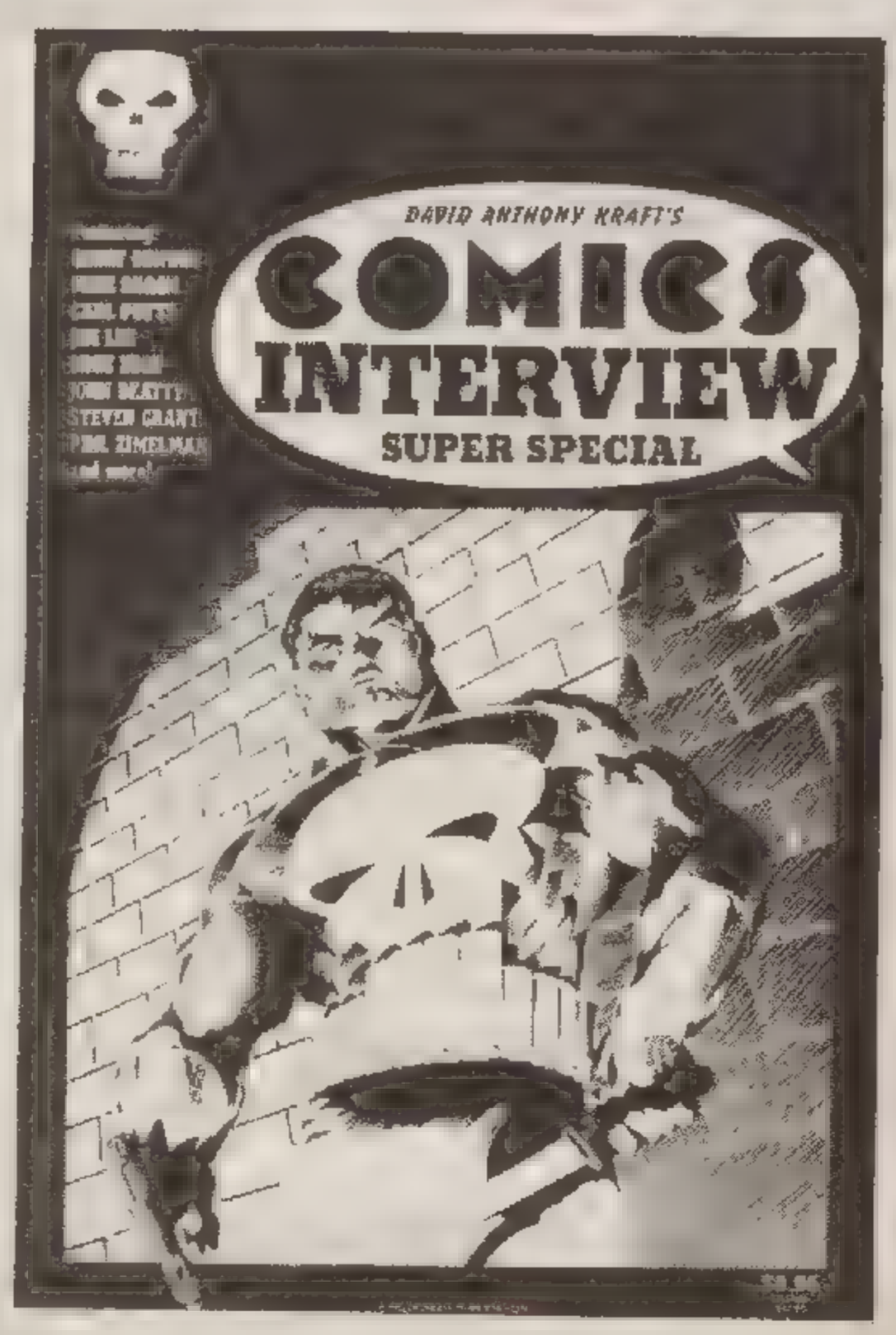

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"By 1956 we had an audience that had never read FLASH."

was right after Labor Day and the answer was obvious. Why did they die?

RENEE: *Why?*

JULIE: It's obvious, kids went back to school. Kids went back to school after Labor Day, so we'd always cut the print run right after Labor Day. If you have to eat a lot of returns you lose a lot of money.

RENEE: *Sure.*

JULIE: JUSTICE LEAGUE would sell 71% in the summer, and all of a sudden it would go down to 60%. Of course, my summer sales of JUSTICE LEAGUE were extraordinary because we introduced a series of stories that I called "Crisis Earth" where the Justice League always teamed up with the Justice Society. Those *always* sold well.

RENEE: *Did you first develop JUSTICE LEAGUE, HAWKMAN and STRANGE SPORTS STORIES for BRAVE AND BOLD?*

JULIE: JUSTICE LEAGUE had a three-issue run in BRAVE AND BOLD. When FLASH sold very well in SHOWCASE — we had four different tryout issues and each one sold better than the other — we put out FLASH in its own magazine.

An interesting sideline, it has nothing to do with BRAVE AND BOLD — you see, you got me started and I can't stop talking — when we were given the go-ahead to put out FLASH again, the last issue of FLASH in the Golden Age was in 1949 and this is 1956, seven years have lapsed. Kids only read comics between ages of eight to twelve, a four-year period, so by 1956 we had a whole new audience of no one that had ever read THE FLASH. So I said to Irwin, "Well, if we're going to continue THE FLASH, what shall I do, call it issue #1 or issue #105 because the *last* issue of FLASH COMICS was #104?" What would you guess he would say?

RENEE: *You used #105*

JULIE: Yeah, but why?

RENEE: *Because it was the same name?*

JULIE: Yeah, but no one remembers THE FLASH, I just told you that. When FLASH came out in 1956 most of the kids who read it before weren't reading comics anymore. I'll tell you the answer. Nowadays there's no question, it would be FLASH #1. But what Irwin said — once again showing you how the world was different when we had newsstand sales "If a reader goes to a newsstand and sees a magazine that says issue #1 and a magazine alongside it says issue #105, he'll buy the issue #105 because that must be a damn good magazine if it's going that many issues. #1, who knows if it's any good?"

RENEE: *That's true.*

JULIE: You see, that's how times have changed in the last 30 years.

RENEE: *Was STRANGE SPORTS STORIES in BRAVE AND BOLD?*

JULIE: I believe so. That was my own favorite magazine.

RENEE: *That's a weird concept, could you explain how that works?*

JULIE: Yes. Have you looked through the issues?

RENEE: *I've looked at a few.*

JULIE: What happened, sports stories were a fair to good seller in pulp magazines, and we always put into comics whatever pulp magazines had done, Westerns, detective stories and so on. There were magazines called SPORTS STORIES and THRILLING SPORTS and so on. But the difficulty in telling

A very early cover by Gil Kane. Note the wash technique, creating an unusual tone effect.

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DC
NATIONAL COMICS
OCT.
NO. 8
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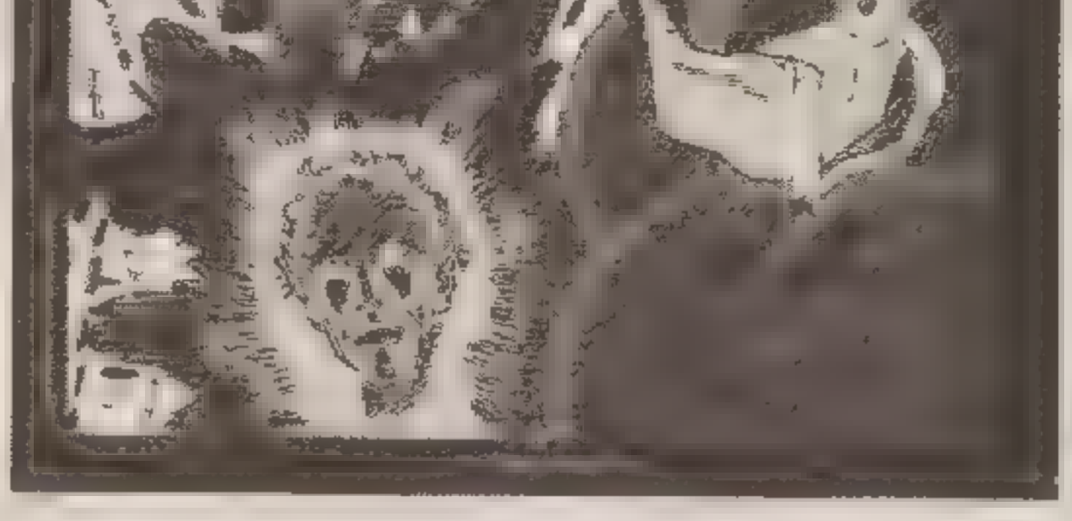

MASTERS OF MARVEL

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STAN LEE - marvel's "stan the man" remembers
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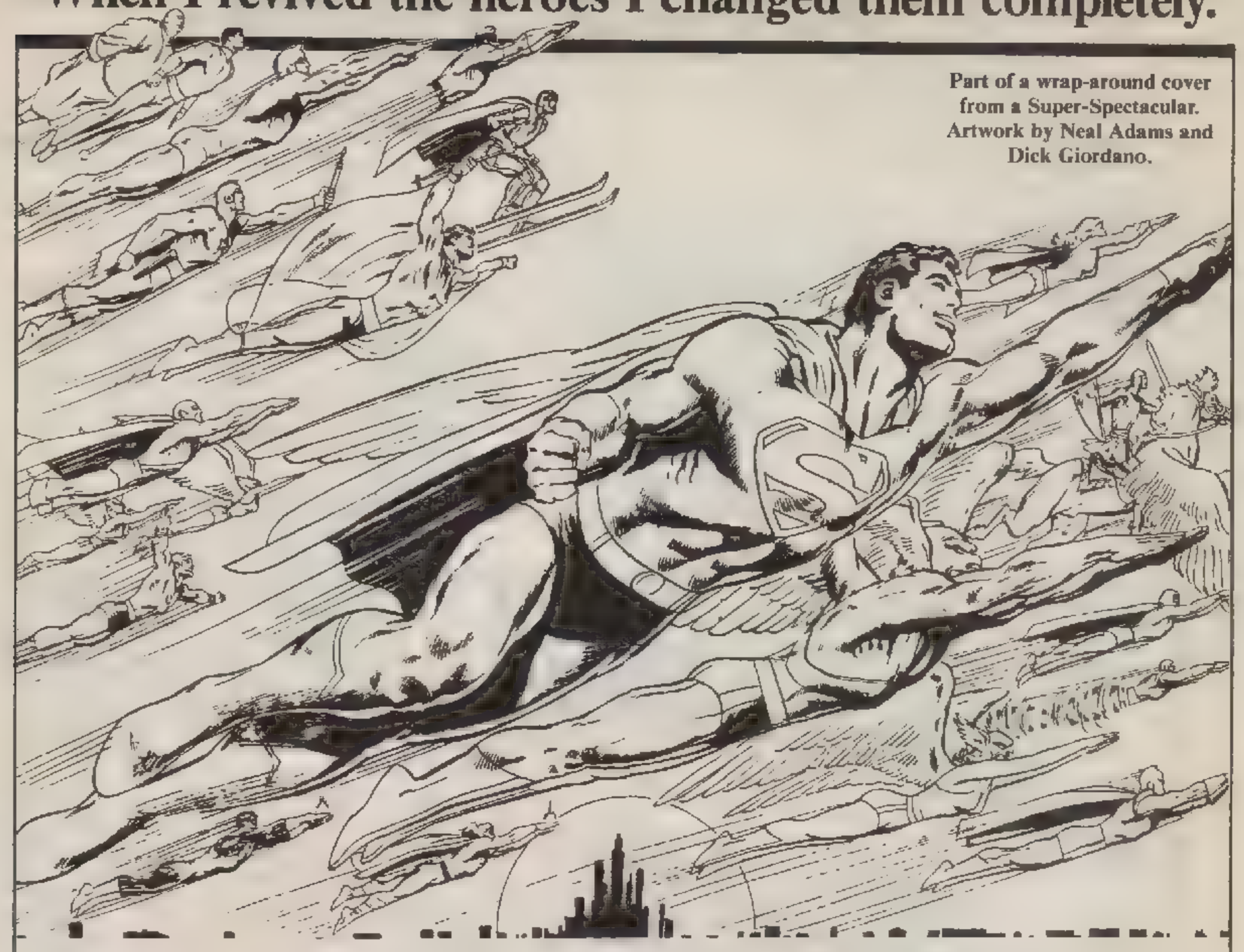
"When I revived the heroes I changed them completely."



Part of a wrap-around cover from a Super-Spectacular. Artwork by Neal Adams and Dick Giordano.

sports stories is it's all *action*, and when you draw one panel, say the batter hitting the ball, in a comic it becomes monotonous. So what I innovated, every panel had an introductory caption illustrated in silhouette. For example, if the batter was up, you see a silhouette of him standing there poised to hit the ball, and the next panel, which would be a regular panel, would show you the swing. It's almost like a moving comic, you see.

And it was the most difficult magazine I ever did, because to do sports stories with a science-fiction angle became very tough. I thought of a lot of crazy ideas. There was a World Series where the New York Yankees played a headless ball team — they had no *heads!* It was an empty uniform. You saw a bat, you saw no hands; you saw an emptiness where a face would be. Another time we had another championship in which the whole ball club, naturally, was made up of gorillas. *(Laughter.)*

RENEE: *Did those stories sell well?*

JULIE: No. It sold nicely, but not nice enough. We put out about five issues. I think it started in BRAVE AND BOLD, and then we put out a separate magazine called STRANGE SPORTS STORIES. One of my most favorite magazines, and most difficult.

RENEE: *You started HAWKMAN in BRAVE AND BOLD.*

JULIE: That's right. HAWKMAN had originally appeared as a feature in the old FLASH COMICS back in the '40s. The lead changed, in other words if the January issue would have the Flash on the cover, February would have Hawkman — it would alternate. HAWKMAN was a pretty good feature — at least I enjoyed it. So I revived it.

When I revived the heroes from the '40s into the '60s and early '70s, I changed them completely, the only thing I kept was the name. The one who did HAWKMAN so well was a teenager, about fourteen or fifteen, whose name was **Joe Kubert.** He did HAWKMAN back in the early days of FLASH COMICS. So, when I started it I asked him if he would be willing to do HAWKMAN again, and he agreed. And those three issues of BRAVE AND BOLD were really *beautifully* illustrated stories! They were written by **Gardner Fox,** who wrote the original HAWKMAN. But they were completely updated and changed.

RENEE: *What do you think of taking established characters and revamping them?*

JULIE: Many people have asked if I think it was a good idea when **John Byrne** took over SUPERMAN to change it around. When I did SUPERMAN, I changed it, too. But the company got a little nervous about all the changes I was making — many that John made. I reduced his strength, I gave him a new suit of clothes, I got rid of all the Kryptonite, I got rid of all those crazy robots that were masquerading as Superman. The one thing, there's still a lot of controversy about it, but if you can get away with Clark Kent being a reporter and Superman at the same time — hard to believe, right — I felt he could do the same thing as a television reporter. The reason I did that was because youngsters, I believe, do not read the newspapers. They may read the sports column, they may read the strips, but they don't read the news, so to speak. So it didn't *mean* anything that Clark Kent got a scoop, they didn't even know what a scoop was.

But everyone watches television, so I put him on television. And I was able to

"There's nothing more *exciting* than to start

do things with a television reporter I could never do with a newspaper reporter. For example, in one case he was doing a remote, a one-man remote, and an airplane was falling out of the sky! He was on camera, how was he going to save the airplane? How would you save it? Think fast!

RENEE: *Ahhh!*

JULIE: Well, I'll think fast for you. Clark Kent said, "and now back to the studio for a commercial."

RENEE: *Sure.*

JULIE: So in two minutes he changed to Superman, saved the plane, then got back as Clark Kent for the broadcast. Another instance, he was reading the news, 6:00 news, and while he was talking he sees another disaster taking place, say there's a building on fire with some people in it. He's on camera, he's got maybe five minutes to go. How was he going to get out of that studio to save the people in the burning building?

RENEE: *Cut to another commercial?*

JULIE: No, no, you can't do that. In television there's always a studio manager or director who holds up a slate and tells you how much time you have left. So the guy held up the slate and maybe it said five minutes, written in chalk, so he uses heat vision to change the chalk marks around so it says five seconds. We never could do that with Clark Kent as a newspaper reporter. You see how it gave me new things to do. I was sick and tired of the same old ducking into the storeroom on some flimsy excuse.

RENEE: *What was the hardest part about being an editor —?*

JULIE: There was no hard part, I loved every minute of it. Let's put the favorite part. The favorite part was plotting. The least favorite part was proofreading. Although I am an excellent proofreader, it always took time.

Oh, there was something I started to say earlier I don't think I finished. **Gardner Fox** would come in about 9:15 and around 11:45 we had everything solved but maybe an escape from the trap. We went out to lunch and we came back, and the problem was solved. None of us thought about it, our subconscious worked on it. Our minds kept working all of the time, even when we were eating.

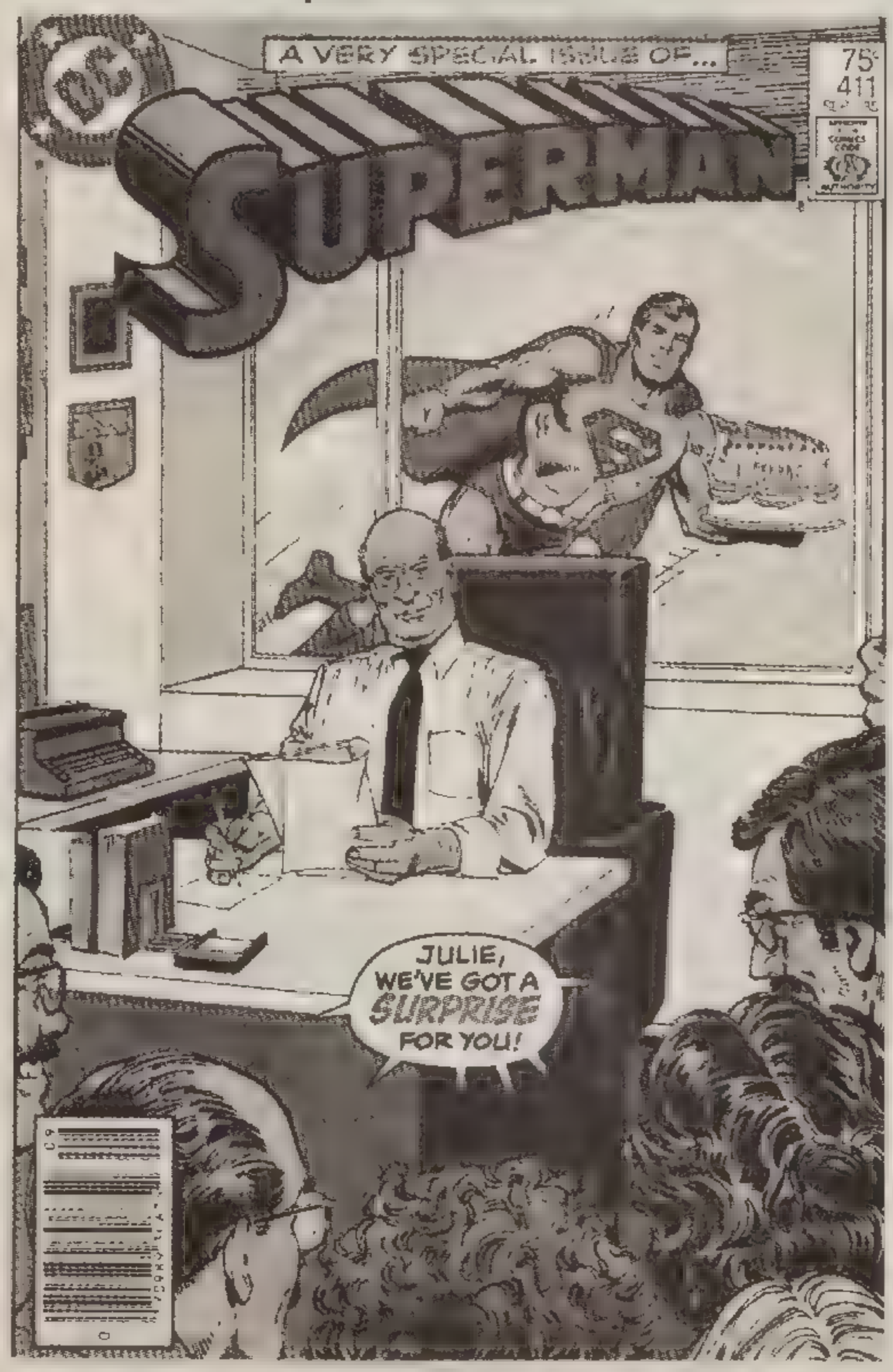
RENEE: *Do you think most editors don't have that kind of input now?*

JULIE: Well, I don't know what most editors are doing, whether they have the ability. They should test it out. I would hope they would, because there's nothing more *exciting* than to start with nothing and wind up with something! Like a writer sitting down to stare at a blank sheet of paper and coming up with a story, there's nothing more gratifying than to create something out of nothing. That was my favorite part. Proofreading was a necessity. In those days we had no proofreaders, you were your own proofreader. Often when an artist brought in the work I would look at the art and proofread at the same time, which is not the easiest thing to do – I assume there were a lot of errors back in those days.

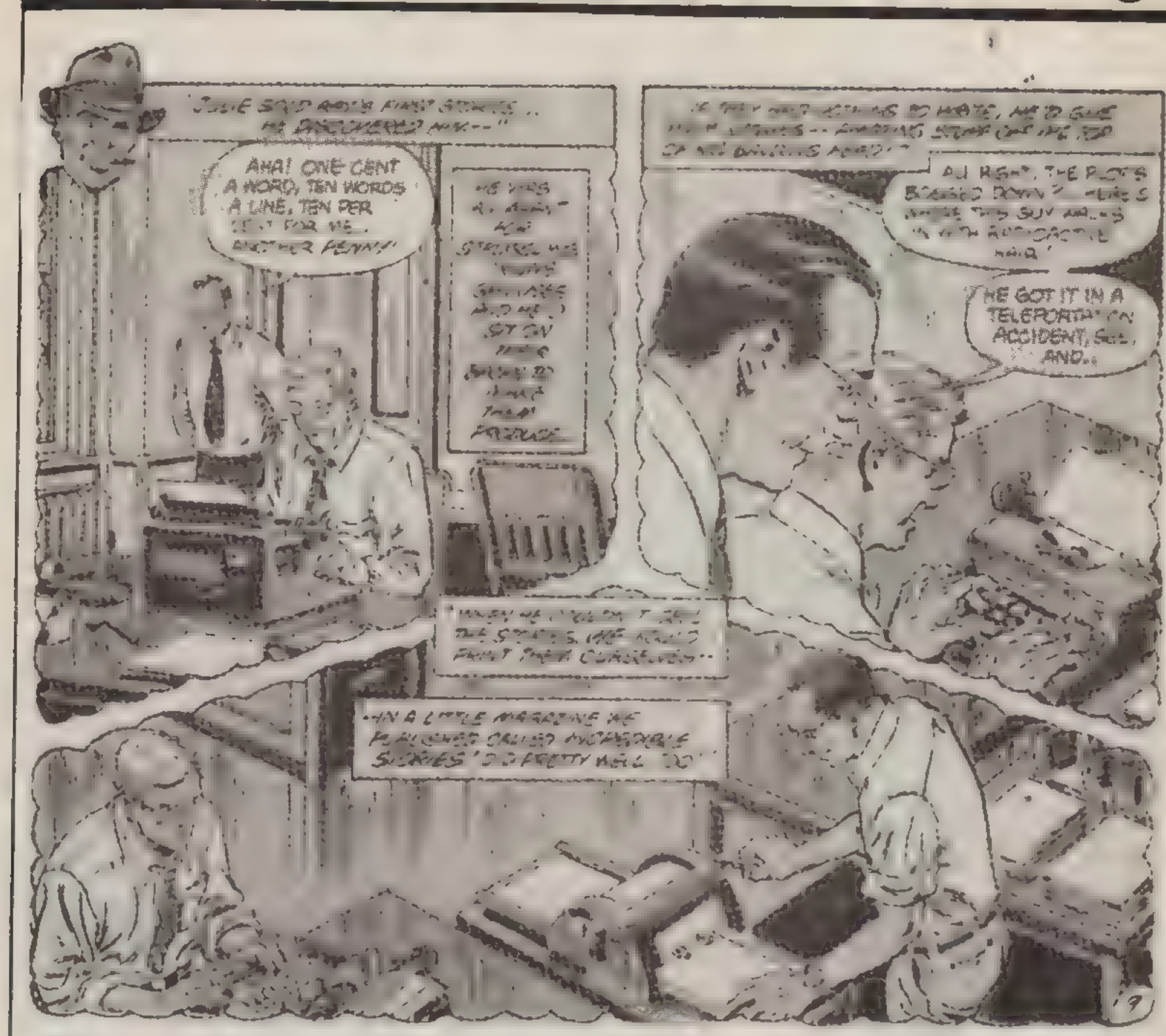
I loved doing the letter department. I used to get a lot of mail, and when it came the end of the month I'd have so much mail I'd be hard pressed to know which letters to use. So I made a code for myself, it was either numerically or alphabetically — let's say it was numerically. If it got a "1" that means it had to be printed. If it got a "2" it got printed if there wasn't a "1" to print. When you got to "4" and "5" it was almost hopeless, but once in awhile you'd have to use one in order to fill out the column. And I'd often write little clever answers to all these letters. That, you know, was the beginning of fandom, comic-book fandom, because I printed the addresses of the letter writers

RENEE: *Really, you started that?*

Julie and friends from the 1985 cover of Superman #411. Next page: three interior panels from the same issue.



with nothing and wind up with something."


AHA! ONE CENT A WORD, TEN WORDS A LINE, TEN PER ... FOR ME... ANOTHER PENNY!
ALL RIGHT, THE PLOTS BOGGED DOWN ... HERE'S WHERE THIS GUY AMAZO IN WITH AUTOMATIC HAIR!
HE GOT IT IN A TELEPORTATION ACCIDENT, SEE, AND...

JULIE: Yeah. I got that out of science fiction; the same thing happened with science-fiction fandom. By printing the addresses it allowed the fans to write to each other, and before you knew it they got together.

RENEE: *Why were there no credits on stories then?*

JULIE: I can't answer that. When I did STRANGE ADVENTURES I gave credit, especially because I used big-time science-fiction writers. I used **Edmond Hamilton, H.L. Gold** who was later the editor and founder of GALAXY, **Manly Wade Wellman** who was a grand master of science fiction and fantasy. I thought it would have name value. Someone who reads science fiction would see the name **Edmond Hamilton** and would pick it up.

But credits weren't done a lot, and it's unfortunate. I must tell you, **Bob Kane** feels bad about the fact that he never gave **Bill Finger** credit, and he's trying to make up for it. The name was just **Bob Kane,** although with **Siegel** and **Schuster** they both took credit. But there simply were no credits, and to this day we do not know who wrote some of the stories.

RENEE: *No one kept records?*

JULIE: No. I kept records, but only from about 1950 or '51 on. There *were* records, of course, but there was no editorial record. The accounting department would know that SUPERMAN #14 was written by so and so and he got a certain amount of money, but those records, I'm sure, are gone forever. They would also know who did the pencilling and who did the inking, but there's no trace of those records to my knowledge.

RENEE: *What innovative things do you think you brought to the comics you did? Did you bring some innovative ideas because you were involved in science fiction before you did comics?*

JULIE: Yes. I have a strong scientific interest, and basically comics are science-fiction minded. Let's face it, they aren't regular characters. ADAM STRANGE, for example, always was based on scientific facts. I thought of Adam Strange as a thinking man's super-hero. He always came into conflict against superior scientific odds, weaponry and so on. All he had going for him was his mind. I always had to figure out how Adam Strange using his scientific knowledge would overcome superior scientific weapons. I loved Adam Strange.

When it was decided to do a scientific hero, as contrasted with the anthology stories in STRANGE ADVENTURES and MYSTERY IN SPACE, **Jack Schiff** and I had a discussion. We each had a choice of taking a scientific hero from today or from the future. He opted for one from the future. I opted for one from today because I think it's more dramatic having something strange and imaginary happening today than in the far future which is *already* imaginary.

"I dubbed The Atom 'the world's smallest superhero.'"

RENEE: *When you started were comics predominantly super-hero oriented? Have they always been that way?*

JULIE: All adventure types. As I mentioned, each of those magazines had three or four stories in them. There was a feature called RED, WHITE AND BLUE, some teenagers that weren't super-heroes. Mr. Terrific wasn't a super-hero, that I recall. The original Atom wasn't a super-hero, he just had a strong punch

RENEE: *Why do you think things developed more towards the super-hero genre?*

JULIE: Because we could do more imaginary things. How many things can you have the Atom do except punch out somebody? It would be neat — as I did eventually, when I had the Atom – to have him shrink in size. This had been done before

In case you don't know it, I dubbed the Atom the world's smallest super-hero, and since all super-heroes have to have two identities, a super-hero identity and a civilian identity, I had to come up with a name. It suddenly came to me what it had to be, and I wrote to this friend of mine who was the editor of AMAZING

CALENDAR
page by the team of Adams & Giordano.

"I have a picture of Ray Palmer standing with me."

STORIES, could I use his name. And he said, "Sure, I'd love it." The point was, he had an accident when he was a kid and he never grew more than 4'7" or 4'8". That was **Ray Palmer.** There really was a **Ray Palmer** who was the editor of AMAZING STORIES and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. I have a picture of **Ray Palmer** standing with me and **Mort Weisinger.**

Mort Weisinger was my oldest friend, but that's another story entirely. He and I did pretty much everything that went into SUPERMAN; he was editor of SUPERMAN from 1941 to 1970, and I was SUPERMAN editor from 1971 to 1985

RENEE: *Now, BRAVE AND BOLD started out as adventure stories with Viking Prince and Golden Gladiator and Silent Knight, and then later on it switched completely over to super-heroes. Was there a reason for that?*

JULIE: There's *always* the same reason. We'd get complaints, "Why did you discontinue GREEN LANTERN?" The answer's always obvious, it wasn't making any money, or it didn't make as much money as we thought we could make with another magazine. We never discontinued a magazine just out of sheer orneriness except maybe in the case of GREEN LANTERN, now that I think about it. We innovated what we called very relevant stories and it did fair but not that much better. But probably the best reason why we discontinued it was because **Neal Adams** never did the work on time.

So, super-heroes give the writers more leeway, because anything you can imagine you can do with a super-hero. You cannot do it with a realistic hero, it's very tough although I must say that they did that very thing in BATMAN and almost *ruined* the magazine. They had Batman going back into time! Batman is a realistic character, he has no superpowers whatsoever. He's better than anyone else, but he can't go back into time, he can't go into space, he can't be fighting Martian gorillas. That was going on in BATMAN. The minute I took it over I brought him down to a straight detective character using his wits. I had to make his *foes* a little fantastic. Not that I innovated the Penguin, but he lifts up an umbrella and he goes flying through the air or some crazy thing like that.

RENEE: *Was the success of SHOWCASE maybe the catalyst for changing BRAVE AND BOLD more to super-heroes?*

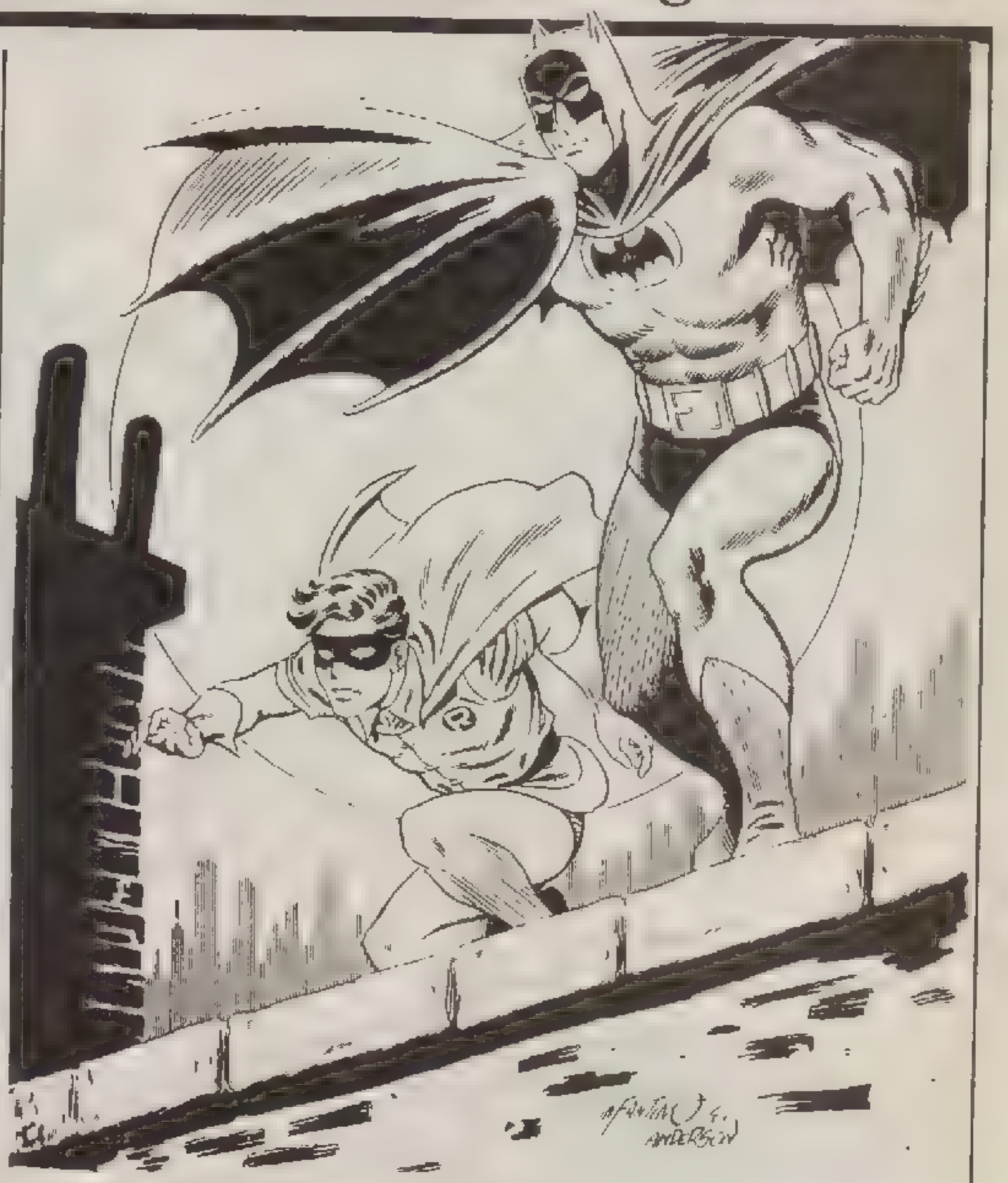
JULIE: Possibly. We weren't always privy to the sales figures I must tell you one case – this is a case of how I was given an assignment — I was asked to do a number of things that appeared on television. When CHARLIE CHAN went on television, I had to do that. There were some others. The only thing I was never involved with was animation I never cared for THE FOX AND THE CROW or THE DODO AND THE FROG. And I never did humor magazines like JACKIE GLEASON or BOB HOPE

The Western movies and television shows in the '40s and '50s were doing very well, and they were singing cowboys and that sort of stuff, **Roy Rogers** and so on. **Whit Ellsworth** at that time was our editor-in-chief and said he was going out to Hollywood to line up a cowboy star for a cowboy comic book. He came back — "Who'd ya get, who'd ya get?" "Boys, I got us **Jimmy Wakely!**" "Jimmy *who?*" *(Laughter.)* Well, **Jimmy Wakely** was a singing cowboy, and he looked a little bit like **Bing Crosby.** "Okay, Julie, do the book!" *(Laughter.)* So I thought, "**Jimmy Wakely, Jimmy Wakely,** what can we do?" The one thing I had to do was get the best darn artist I could think of who was working for us to do the book. And he agreed to do it, and that was **Alex Toth.** Have you heard of **Alex Toth?**

RENEE: *Yes.*

JULIE: Alex is absolutely great, and he agreed to do it. But the magazine — I don't remember how long a run it had the final figures came in something like 70%, and we killed the book. I hope you're impressed by what I'm saying. Books sell about 20-25% these days, so 70% is some wonderfully high figure by today's standards. But JIMMY WAKELY sold 70% when other books were selling 75% or 80%, so we discontinued the book to go on to something else

RENEE: *What do you think the appeal of Batman was that he was picked to star in most of THE BRAVE AND THE*



. . . Back in time we go, with Carmine Infantino and Murphy Anderson's Boy Wonder and the Batman. Note that Infantino is presently the artist on the BATMAN newspaper strip, currently running in COMICS REVUE.

"Superman and Batman, I don't know how it worked

"Have you heard of Alex Toth?" For Renee and all of you, here are some of Toth's pencils, from SUPERMAN ANNUAL #9.

BOLD?

JULIE: I wasn't doing BRAVE AND BOLD at that time. I think possibly the fact was that WORLD'S FINEST *always* sold well. The idea of Superman teaming up with Batman had a certain amount of appeal. It must have struck someone that WORLD'S FINEST did well, BATMAN was starting to sell well, so why not have Batman team up with somebody else in BRAVE AND BOLD!

RENEE: *Do you think that worked as well as with Superman and Batman in WORLD'S FINEST?*

JULIE: I don't know, you'd have to look at the figures. How long did they last?

RENEE: *Oh, gosh -*

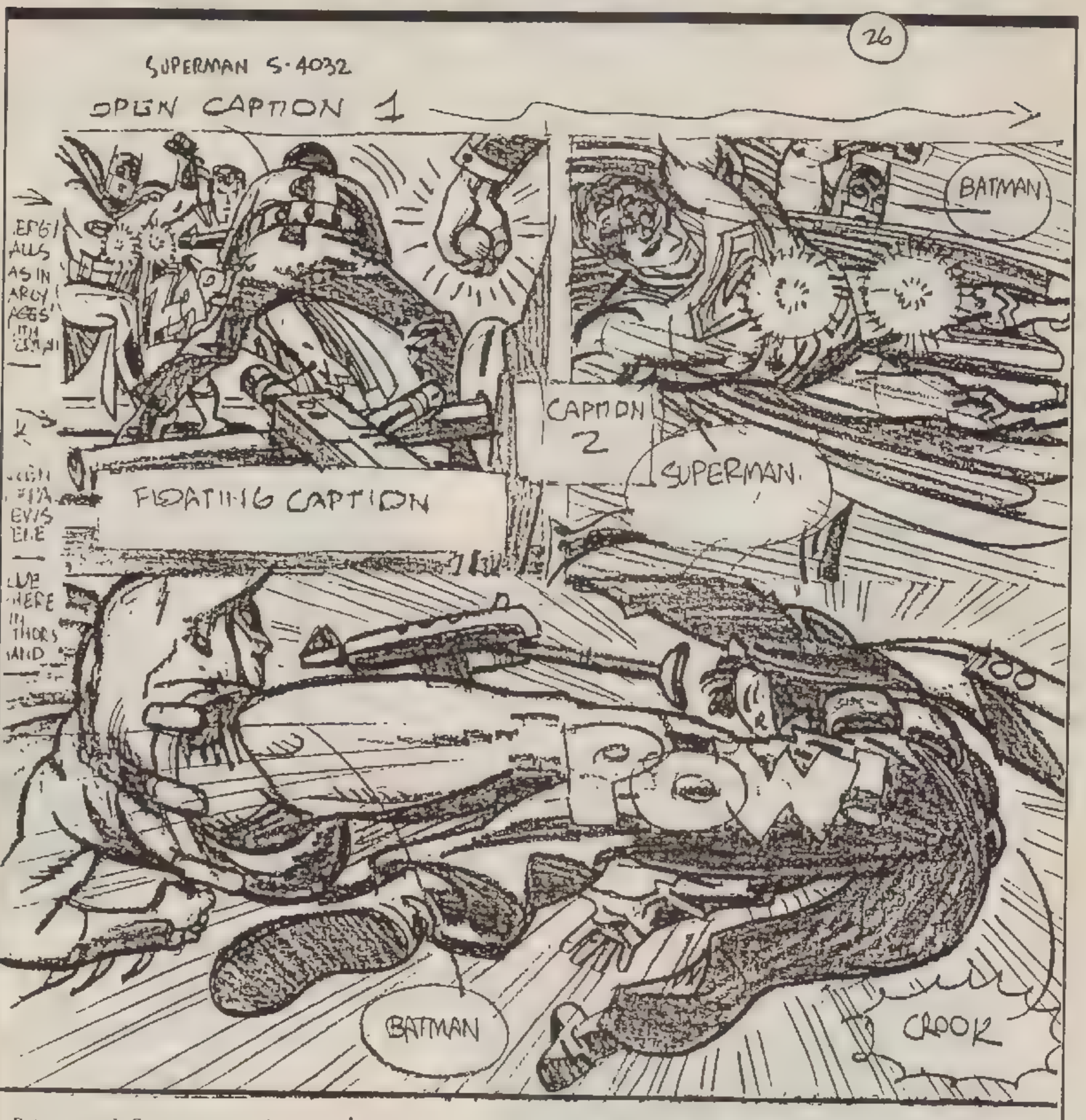
JULIE: There's your answer. They certainly wouldn't keep going with the magazine just to give **Robert Haney** a check every month.

RENEE: *They don't really do team-ups that much any more, there isn't a book that's just team-ups, like Batman teaming up with a different person every month, Superman teaming up with a different person every month.*

JULIE: Yeah. Superman and Batman, I don't know how it worked so long. They're not ideally suited for each other. Batman can't cope with Superman realistically. I did WORLD'S FINEST for about fifteen or eighteen issues, and I tried to humanize the thing. I remember one beginning, I gave it to **Gardner Fox** or maybe **Bill Finger,** the story started with the story being over. Superman and Batman had just had an adventure and there they are sitting on a roof or on a billboard or something, and Batman says he'd better get on going home because he's got to do his Bruce Wayne bit tomorrow. Superman doesn't have to sleep or anything, so he says, "Well, can't you stay around a little longer, I have nothing to do. Why don't we sit down and talk a little." See, now that was a beautiful beginning for me, and it was to try to dig into what it was all about.

You just don't happen to have a terrible crisis occurring on Earth and

so long. They're not ideally suited for each other."



Batman and Superman teaming up, because they're so utterly unlike each other. And whatever villain was introduced, if it appeared in a SUPERMAN magazine he would handle it alone, if it appeared in a BATMAN magazine he would handle it alone, and in WORLD'S FINEST Superman and Batman had to team up together. Those were not easy stories to do, and I guess eventually it ran out of gas.

RENEE: *What was your personal favorite character that you worked with — do you even have one?*

JULIE: My answer is the stock answer: Whatever one I'm doing at the moment. Let me put it *this* way: Mort, my oldest friend, who edited SUPERMAN from 1941 on, would say, "Julie, you know when I leave here someone's going to edit SUPERMAN; you're the one that's going to do it." I said, "Mort, please don't leave, I don't *like* SUPERMAN. I don't want to do it; I won't feel *comfortable* doing it." But Mort said he was going to do it. Every year Mort would go to **Jack Liebowitz,** who was our president, publisher, and say, "Jack, you know I want to be a writer, I don't want to do comics anymore." Jack would say, "No, no, you *can't* leave." And he'd give Mort a raise. This kept on till 1970 when **Jack Liebowitz** retired. So Mort left and I was told to edit SUPERMAN

I went in to the publisher, **Carmine Infantino,** and said, "If you want me to do SUPERMAN, I've *got* to make some changes. I'm not going to do it the way Mort did it." When I took over BATMAN I introduced what is called the New Look. You know the others, HAWKMAN, ATOM, JUSTICE LEAGUE, GREEN LANTERN, FLASH – I did them my own way. I said, "If you're going to leave me SUPERMAN then I'm going to make a lot of changes." He says, "Go ahead and do it, the book is not selling well, anyway." And then I said to myself, "Who am I going to get to write it?" I wanted, really, the *best* writer working for me at the

"Comics are not just for kids anymore.

Top row: A few images from Infantino's HOW TO DRAW THE FLASH, from a FLASH giant of the mid-1960s. Bottom row: Superman undergoing every emotion, by Curt Swan, originally published as a model sheet for aspiring artists.

time, so I went over to him and said, "How would you like to write SUPERMAN?" He said, "No, no, I don't *identify* with Superman, I don't want to do it." I said, "I have an idea how it could work, just do it for me for a year." So he agreed to do it; it was **Denny O'Neil.** Denny wrote my first year of SUPERMAN, and that was it. Then I got **Gardner Fox,** and finally **Cary Bates** came around.

But then we had to revert to the traditional SUPERMAN, they didn't want me fooling around with the character too much. Another thing, when I took over BATMAN it had been through the Martian routine, the gorillas and all those things, time travelling — it was crazy. So when I took over I initiated the idea of putting a yellow ellipse around Batman's symbol. That's been worked into the movie pretty well. The fact is that Batman is not immortal, he can be killed, so I was criticized because they said it would give the crooks a *target* to shoot at. But in the movie that's where Batman had his most protection, right behind the Bat symbol.

RENEE: *What have you seen that's been the most important change?*

JULIE: Well, certainly, the reading public. The fact is the readers in the early days, as I mentioned, started about eight and gave up at twelve. Now they start at eight or maybe younger and keep going and going and never give up. That's a *very* important change because we do comics that are not just for kids anymore. That, to me, is a wonderful, wonderful change.

RENEE: *Do you think comics are still destined to be mostly super-heroes?*

JULIE: No, I don't think so. Only super-

That, to me, is a wonderful change."

heroes sold well during the War years, and they suddenly died out around 1950 for whatever reason. Super-heroes may have done well because we were at war and super-heroes did what we wanted, fighting the Japanese and the Germans and so on. But when things came back to normal they wanted a different approach. There are always cycles in comics. There will always be super-heroes, but there will be trends in other areas. There are always revivals. We might go back to the early BRAVE AND BOLD type of stories with the heroes of yesteryear. It's hard to say. I wouldn't be surprised.

I'm really amazed that comics are basically the same form now as they were when they started out back in the '30s. Comics have evolved over the years but they're basically the same. The artwork has improved, the printing has improved, even the *paper* has improved, but it's basically the same thing. But who knows what they'll be in 50 years from now! I hope I'm still around to observe the changes that will be made. Many people have assured me I will be still living 50 years from now, and it's wonderful for them to say. I don't know if I would *want* to be that old, I may be too infirm, but I would like to see how comics grow.

I told **Joe Kubert** — because he's got his school I said, "For an assignment why don't you tell one of your students to put out a comic book as it will be in the year 2001." If Joe ever did it I don't know, but I think it would be an interesting project. It might be an interesting project around DC at some time, maybe I'll bring it up. It may be on a computer.

"I don't want to publish avant garde material."

As of 1987, Milano Libri became a wholly-owned subsidiary of the many-tentacled Rizzoli Empire. Under this imprint are published some of the most prestigious comics periodicals and books in Italy, including CORTO MALTESE and LINUS.

At the helm of Milano Libri is Fulvia Serra, with whom we met on a rainy grey day in Milan, Italy — but only after clearing a security that would do the Kremlin proud.

What, we wondered, were we in for?

Much to our surprise and delight, the Direttore Responsabile — her title equates to our Editor-in-Chief or Managing Director — proved to be friendly, open, informative, fluent in English, and keenly aware of the important developments occurring here, there and everywhere in comics.

Unique unto itself — and not mentioned in the following interview — is the fact that Milano Libri is solely staffed by women; a result of circumstance initially, which has now become policy . . .

FULVIA SERRA

LINUS: "a new analysis of the Snoopy philosophy."

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT: *We were surprised at your security — they asked to see our passports, and we wondered what is in this building that there should be such security?*

FULVIA SERRA: That is because we passed through a very, very terrible period with the terrorists, and at the end of the month we make the payment to all of the employees and the bank has a very lot of money

DAK: *Ah, I see*

FULVIA: The security is only to make a check of the people who come into the building, and they double-check when they get out. And they want to see your passports, your documents, evidently because in the recent past we have had a terrorism problem in the area, trying to make trouble in this building.

DAK: *Here?*

FULVIA: Yes.

DAK: *Why? Isn't this just a publishing building?*

FULVIA: No, no, not only in *our* publishing building, *everywhere* where there is an industry, where there is a power center. And so they have to protect the entry.

DAK: *I see. When they looked at our passports – Julia is British and I'm American — they gave me my passport back, no problem, and they wrote all of the information down from her passport.*

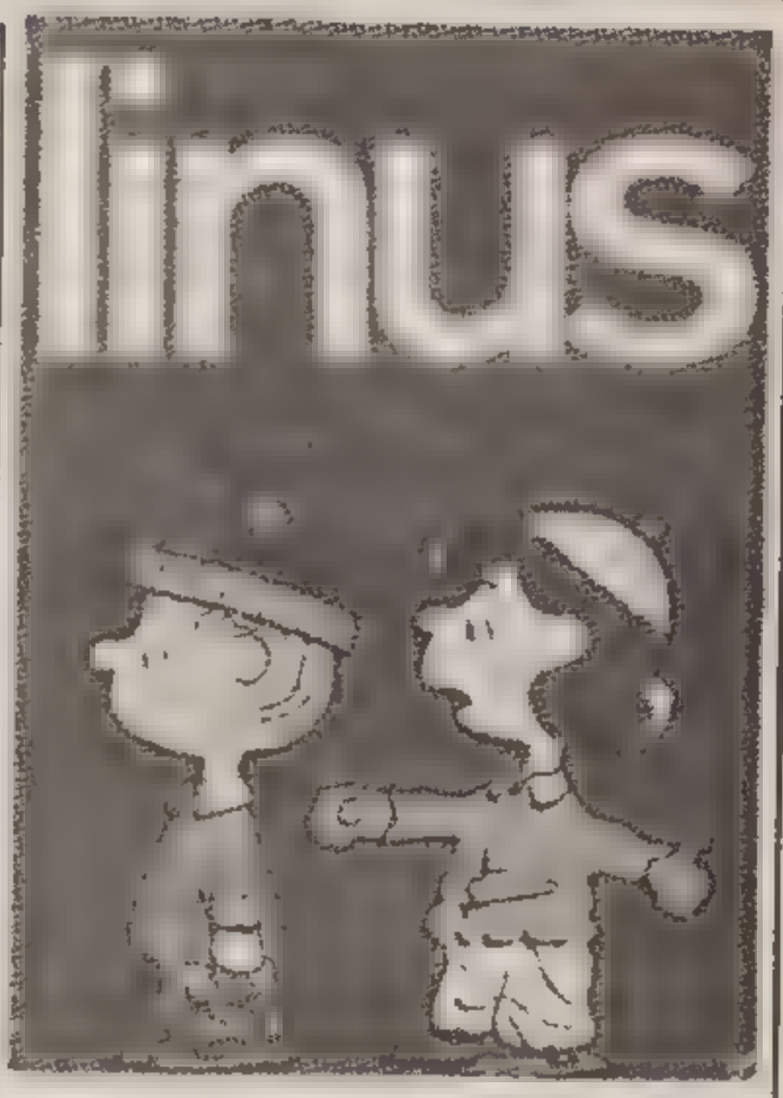
JULIA MATHER: *And kept it.* (Laughter.)

DAK: *I guess Americans are not as well known as terrorists.*

FULVIA: In the future we will have a card to pass automatically and electronically into the building, and so the visitors are always suspected to be something different from visitors. *(Laughter.)* You have to be controlled. *(Laughter.)* They have to know who are you, when you come here, who are you going to visit, and so on.

DAK: *How did you come to be the ... what is your title, Megadirector?* (Points to nameplate.)

FULVIA: No, this is a joke — mega is very big — because in the past I had four magazines under my direction. One was ALTER, which was a monthly magazine directed to the avant-garde of the comics. This was a magazine that was very, very important in developing the new image of the comic cartoons, but because of being avant-garde it had very few readers and we have had to stop the publication. And then I created SNOOPY for babies — for children, from 9 to 12 or 13 years old — last year; and now I have to leave the direction of SNOOPY because of the



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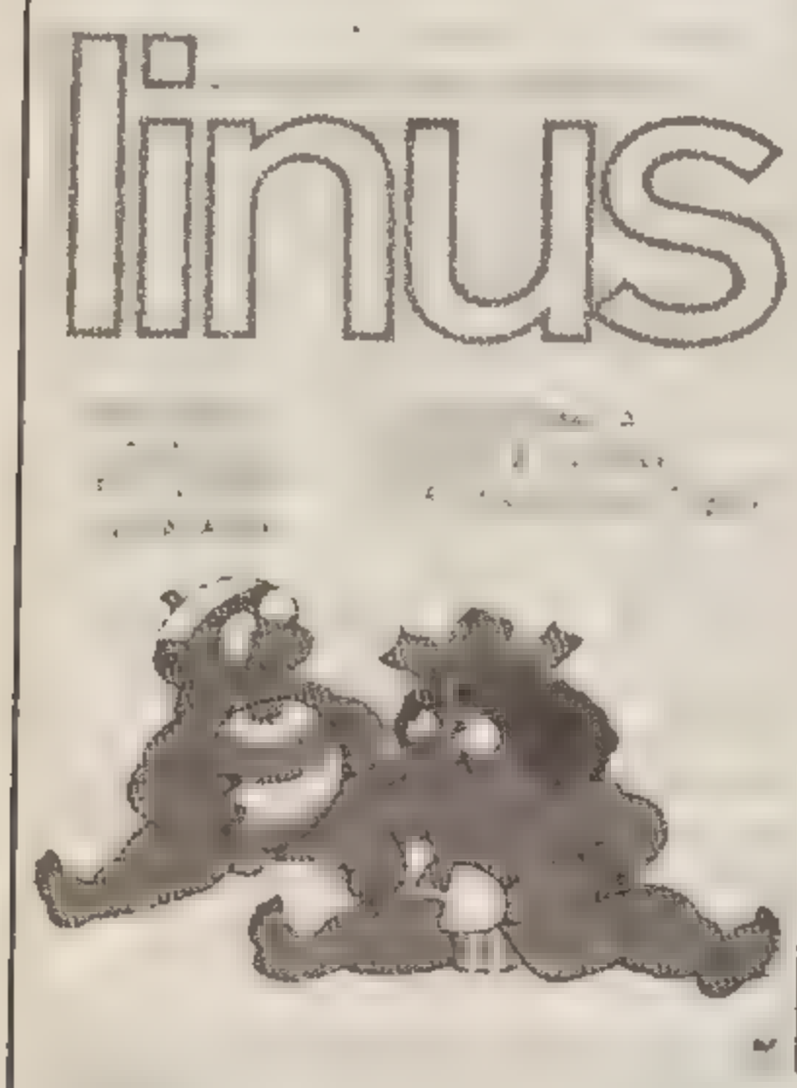
LINUS: created by Umberto Eco.



many, many things that I have to do. I control the books that come from the magazines — we collect the stories that we publish in the magazines, collect as books, and we make about 34 or 35 titles each year — that is a big job and I have no other time to follow all of the magazines that I direct.

JULIA: *Are you using the other magazines to carry on introducing any more of the avant-garde material?*

FULVIA: No, because the avant-garde material is something that doesn't include the narrative, they have only the very nice image, very strong and very well done. It is like an artistic product — but not like something that you have to read, you have to watch only. This is the difficulty of producing a magazine of only avant-garde, and that's why I don't want to publish avant garde. I want to publish something that has a good mix of words and images.

DAK: *Well, for the American readers, I think the association you have with Charles Schulz and PEANUTS would be the place to start. How far back does that go? And how did that come about?*

FULVIA: We started publishing first a book by **Charles Schulz** in 1963, the title was CHARLIE BROWN IS COMING or something like that, which we translated as ARRIVARE CHARLIE BROWN. And then the publisher had the idea to create a magazine including and involving the PEANUTS philosophy, and the knowledge of cartoons, comics, adventure cartoons, classic American comics like DICK TRACY, like POPEYE. To be recognized through a new analysis of the philosophy, of the meaning of the real cultural effect of the cartoons.

DAK: *And this was LINUS?*

FULVIA: LINUS, yes. LINUS started in April 1965, first issue, and this is a monthly magazine enjoyed by a lot of readers. It started with 15,000 copies and now is at 100,000 copies each month.

DAK: *What is the focus of the magazine?*

FULVIA: Now it is directed to the younger reader, starting from 16, to 40 and so on — young in spirit and young in hoping.

DAK: *Has the magazine changed?*

FULVIA: Yes. In the beginning it was a magazine directed to the *snob* readers. *(Laughter.)* Snob readers would stay in the drawing room and chat about the maximum living of the life. And it was directed to architects, to designers, to people who love images in a special way,

LINUS: "directed toward the snob readers."

and who love the analysis that one can do about this kind of drawing. This is why LINUS published **Feiffer,** published DICK TRACY, published LI'L ABNER, and we have a lot of comics, of cartoons, coming from the United States.

DAK: *But over the years the focus of the magazine changed from snobs to a wider audience?*

FULVIA: Yes, to the mass audience, and it is more popular now. The fact is that the starting was with the father, **Umberto Eco,** was the first important person who was interested in the magazine — **Umberto Eco,** the author of THE NAME OF THE ROSE

DAK: *We have heard his name many times here.*

FULVIA: He is a professor, a teacher in the United States, at the University of New York; he is a symbologist. He's most important all over the world, I think, now.

DAK: *We hear his name in comics circles here, but in the United States —*

FULVIA: He's not an author of comics, he is one who studies, the man who started a comics phenomenon. He started this as a symbologist, the symbolism in comics.

DAK: *He wrote about comics in an academic way?*

FULVIA: Yes, yes. He is a *lover* of comics!

DAK: *And that got critical attention for comics.*

FULVIA: Yes. I was the third director of LINUS, first there was **Umberto Eco,** the creator, and then there was **Giovanni Gandini,** he was the founder of LINUS and the owner of the publishing house, Milano Libri, which last year was included completely in the Rizzoli group. In 1970 we were bought by Rizzoli, but not totally — a small percentage of other companies owned the property of Milano Libri Distribuzioni, but now we are totally in the Rizzoli group, from 1987.

DAK: *Is that the same as the bookstore chain?*

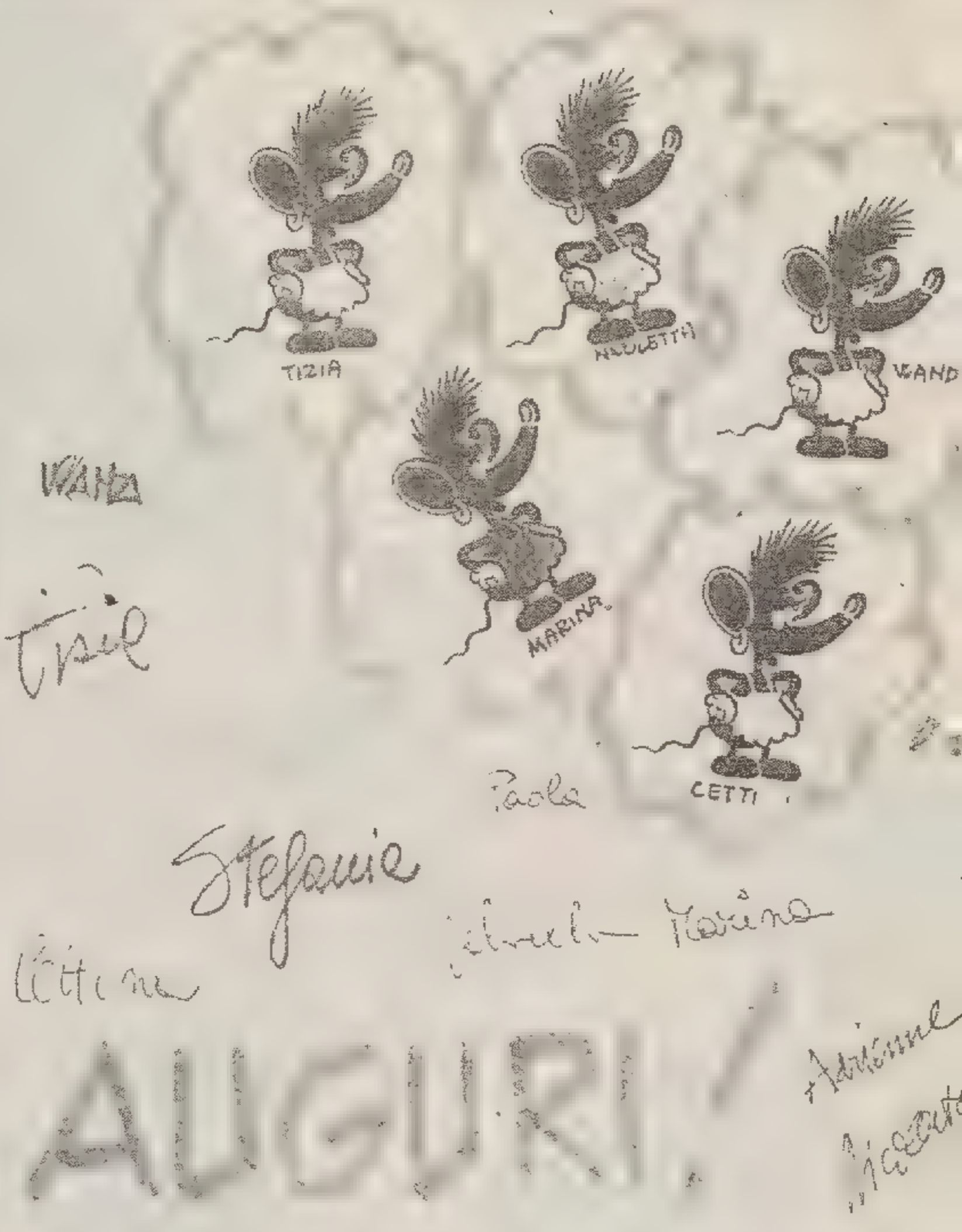
FULVIA: Yes. We have five companies: one for advertising; one for the books; one for the periodicals, the magazines; one for the newspapers; and the other one for the paper production.

JULIA: *And the bookshops come under the book company?*

FULVIA: Yes, under the book society.

DAK: *When did Milano Libri have its start?*

FULVIA: The company Milano Libri was born in 1965, exactly when LINUS was born, and in 1970 when we were first bought by the Rizzoli group, we had a change in direction. The director was **Oreste Del Buono** — he is the most



A cartoon by Bruno D'alfonso of Fulvia, with her two cats, imagining the staff at Milano Libri as mice. Auguri! (I wished — wishing.)

important critic of comics now in Italy. In 1982, a problem arose in the Rizzoli group. We had a lot of problems in that period, a long two year period of a critical financial situation, — they had problems similar to bankruptcy — but finally they have resources and now we are stronger than we were before. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *I had heard of a problem in the States with the bookstores.*

FULVIA: Yes, we had a lot of problems in our publishing house, because of the diffculty with everything that involved news. We had a long period to resurrect and to be new. Now we are new.

DAK: *Would you say that the comics market in Italy has been increasing or decreasing?*

FULVIA: I think that the market in Italy is on a level. Two years ago, we had a decrease, but now we stay in our level with small increases, but not so much. We have cut many many publications, many publications disappeared from the market, because there was a congestion of titles. You know, in the kiosk you could not see the title of one magazine because it was covered by another comic. So there were too many.

JULIA: *So really there was a weeding out of the less popular things.*

FULVIA: Yes. And now we stay on the same level, because the authors are always the same — we cannot find any new artists, and there is not an increase of production.

JULIA: *Because there's a limit of how much can be produced by those people?*

"Popular artists you can count on your fingers."

Milano Libri is the only publishing company in Italy entirely staffed and run by women. (Perhaps in the world.)

FULVIA: Yes, by the artists — because the popular artists you can count on your fingers.

DAK: *We have seen a similar thing happen in the United States. There was an incredible burst of publishing by many new publishers as well as the established publishers, and then we had a crash, a settling, and it weeded out many of those titles.*

FULVIA: Yes.

DAK: *Then we found that the same thing had happened in France*

FULVIA: The same, yes.

DAK: *And here, too.*

FULVIA: Yes. Maybe in Italy we have a motive, a reason for this situation, because of the increasing popularity of TV. This is the crisis of the magazine, I think. that the TV control is easier to use. *(Laughter.)* And for the magazine you have to go to the kiosk to make a selection.

DAK: *And it has to be there, you have to find it.*

FULVIA: Yes, yes, and to read it. I think that the new springtime of the comics will be when the readers find that with the TV control they cannot reread something that they haven't understood or they haven't seen exactly. If they want to see it again they have to have a TV recorder and so on, and not everybody has a TV recorder.

DAK: *You control the rate at which you take in information when you read, and you can spend just as much time as you need to look at the art and look at the words and so on, and that's different for each person. When you go to a movie or you watch television*

FULVIA: You have only the time they give you, yes. And I think that also the advertising society has understood this kind of thing, because if you don't want to see an advertisment on the TV you will change the channel and go to another image. But when you have a magazine, the advertising remains there on the page and you have to see it. This is why the advertising in TV is now at the top and they don't have any increase. Now they have to add a cultural motif to the advertising, not the spot with the man drinking a Coca-Cola or so on. So now they sponsor the program, not just make an advertisment. **Fellini,** the movie director, has a very strong hate for this advertising that interrupts the film, stops the picture; he hates this kind of destruction of the movie.

JULIA: *It's his art.*

FULVIA: You cannot include something about how to clean your glass when you see LA DOLCE VITA. *(Laughter.)* You cannot see how to wash your car or what kind of car you've got to select. In the future I think people who read the magazines will not be attracted by the television, because of the level of the television programs — it's very low.

DAK: *In looking at your shelves, you have a lot of collections of the PEANUTS material.*

FULVIA: Yes. We started with ARRIVARE CHARLIE BROWN. the first was 1963.

DAK: *The books themselves, are these Italian versions of —*

FULVIA: Yes, Italian, and a chronological collection of the strips.

DAK: *PEANUTS is obviously very successful here.*

FULVIA: Yes, Snoopy is the most successful.

DAK: *In the States also.*

FULVIA: Yes. It's something that I think **Schulz** didn't think of when he drew the first Snoopy.

DAK: *It's very difficult to know when you create something —*

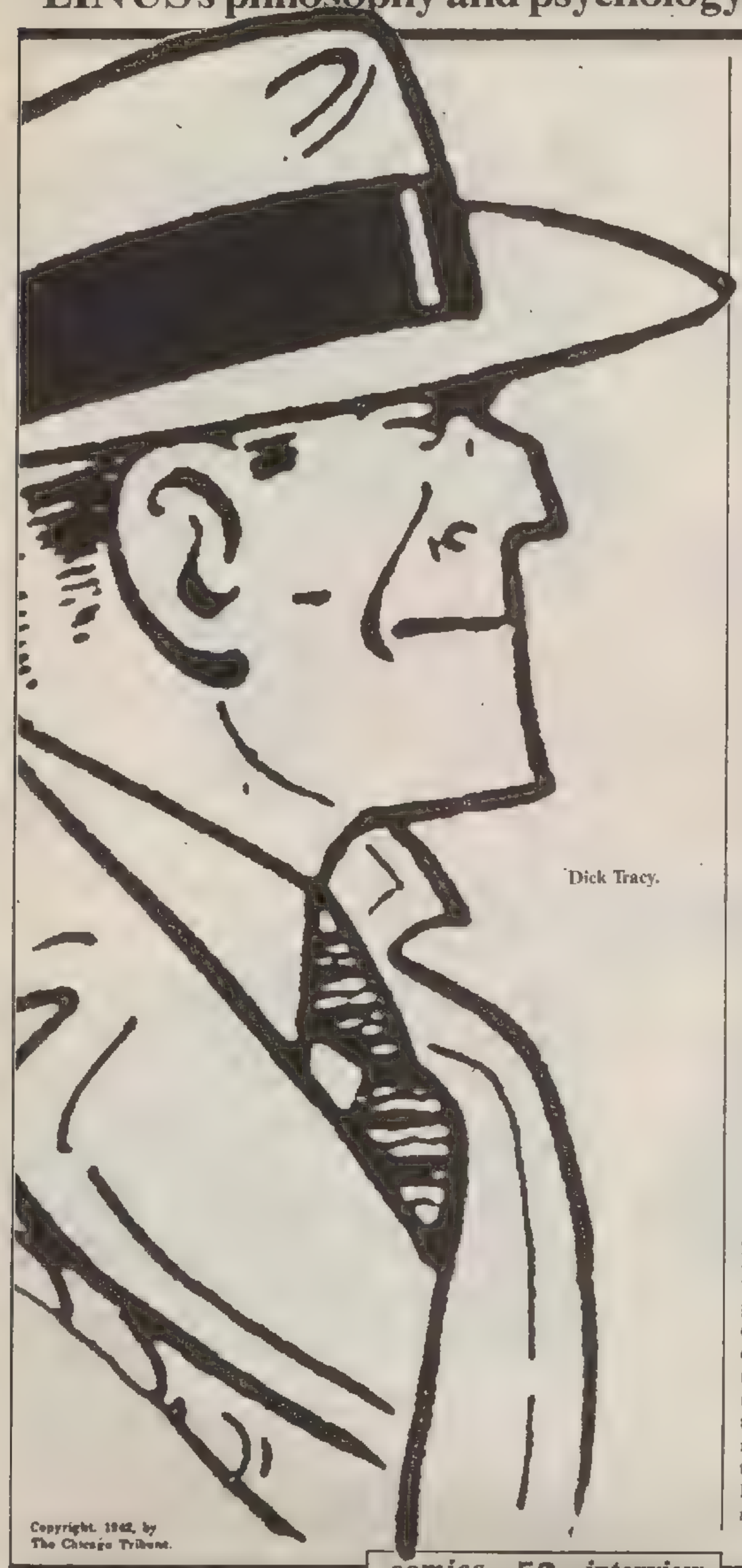
FULVIA: Yes, what is the future of it. We suspected that it was Linus and we used that name as a title, because Linus has this kind of philosophy and psychology that is very **Freudian.** *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *And it's also a Roman sounding name.*

FULVIA: Yes, and he knows a lot of things of our Italian *past*, of our culture. We call it LINUS also because that's a Latin word. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *I thought that that would be the reason*

"LINUS's philosophy and psychology is very Freudian."



Dick Tracy.

Copyright. 1942, by
The Chicago Tribune.

FULVIA: This is the double meaning of this

JULIA: *Have you carried on with the publishing of SNOOPY?*

FULVIA: Yes. I created it and I stayed there one year as director.

JULIA: *Is it successful?*

FULVIA: First, it had a very big success; but now has lower readers because, I think, that Snoopy is familiar with the babies by the merchandising, and to read it is difficult because it is not for babies. SNOOPY has a philosophy for adults, I think, and the readers first see Snoopy through the T-shirts and so on and that is another kind of philosophy.

JULIA: *The drawings are very very cute.*

FULVIA: Yes, but the philosophy is for adults, I think, and this is the reason why LINUS is for adults, not for babies.

DAK: *It looks like a children's strip, but what they're saying is —*

FULVIA: Only the image is of children, but the mental level is adult.

DAK: *Because so much of the PEANUTS material is packaged as merchandise for kids, if I saw this issue of LINUS on a newsstand in the United States I would think this was a children's magazine.*

FULVIA: Yes, but the meaning of the words is something that pertains to the adult life. Lucy is saying, "The snow over here is mine, yours is over there." *(Laughter.)* This is something that happens often in the life, and this is why we chose the words

JULIA: *That's a wonderful summarization of the rat race.* (Laughter.)

FULVIA: Yes. This is for the adult, you see. This is to ask the question like if nuclear power is so safe, then *why* does it happen we have hundreds and hundreds of nuclear accidents?

DAK: *You're sort of a spokesman, in other words.*

FULVIA: Yes, yes. We're very lucky. There was an antinuclear referendum last month that we were involved in. We don't want a nuclear center because they are very dangerous. We want to cut out the law that provided the center with money.

JULIA: *From the government?*

FULVIA: Yes, from the government. We want it to *stop*. We want to have pure power, from the sun, from the water, from everything that is not nuclear, that is not dangerous. And we had in LINUS this nuclear poster, antinuclear poster. "I have made an error, a mistake, I have voted no to the referendum. When you vote no that means that you *want* the nuclear center, that you don't want to abrogate the law."

DAK: *So they worded it in such a way as to confuse people?*

"In France they just call him Corto . . ."

Copyright © 1989 Hugo Pratt

FULVIA: If you say yes it means that you *don't* want the nuclear center, and if you say no that means that you *want* to have the nuclear center. So this is to say, "Do you want to cut out the law to give money to the nuclear centers? You have to say yes, I want to cut out this law because I don't want to give money to this increasing of the nuclear threat." Sometimes LINUS makes this kind of campaign.

DAK: *You also publish CORTO MALTESE.*

FULVIA: CORTO MALTESE is a magazine of adventure, of classic adventure — the philosophy is the adventure of **Conrad Stevenson,** the adventure that you can read and that you can propose to yourself to imagine. It is not fantasy, not science fiction, but something realistic.

DAK: *Yet very fanciful.*

FULVIA: Yes, in a sense.

DAK: *When did CORTO MALTESE begin?*

FULVIA: It started in 1982. It started with my direction.

JULIA: *You have many people in CORTO MALTESE, not just Hugo Pratt.*

FULVIA: Yes. CORTO MALTESE is only the title of the magazine. Like Linus, Corto is one character in the magazine.

JULIA: *Very much similar to the French comics magazine, (A SUIVRE).*

FULVIA: Yes. (A SUIVRE) was similar to ALTER, the magazine that I stopped last year. CORTO MALTESE is like CORTO, another magazine from —

JULIA: *Literally translated, does it mean the Maltese Count?*

FULVIA: No, it is the title of a strip, of a story, by **Hugo Pratt.**

DAK: *I think what she was asking is — if we were to translate CORTO MALTESE, would it have a meaning in English?*

FULVIA: "Corto" is "short," and "Maltese" is from the island of Malta, but the name CORTO is something that in Spain has another meaning — both stupid and very clever people. *(Laughter.)* But the name is Corto — like my name or your name, it is just a name.

DAK: *And you were saying that CORTO MALTESE is simular to a magazine just called CORTO?*

FULVIA: Yes, CORTO. The familiar name of Corto Maltese is Corto. In Italy if you were to think of Corto Maltese you would call him Corto. CORTO is a very popular comic, cartoon, adventure cartoon. And in France they call him Corto and they call the magazine CORTO. It started after our magazine, we began in 1982, they started in 1983 or 1984, I don't remember exactly. Then they become bimonthly and now they are monthly.

Corto Maltese.

"... The Japanese cartoons, so terrible."

JULIA: *What had confused me, I think, is I knew that CORTO MALTESE was in itself a book --*

FULVIA: Yes, we have a lot of books collecting the story of Corto Maltese.

JULIA: *And the magazine takes its name from that strip?*

FULVIA: Yes, the magazine started from the Corto Maltese strip, because of the well-known character. We used it as the title of the magazine because it is the symbol of adventure for the Italian market.

DAK: *Is the Hugo Pratt material new in each issue?*

FULVIA: Yes.

DAK: *And after a certain time you collect that into book form?*

FULVIA: Yes, every time.

DAK: *Is that also true of the other material?*

FULVIA: Yes, that is true of *every* author who has the classic taste of narrative adventure. And we have reportage about adventure that is particularly done in the same landscape or with the same feeling that the cartoons have. There is a reporter who goes to India, maybe, when we have an India story in our comic section.

DAK: *So this is backup material that supports the story?*

FULVIA: Yes, supports this kind of story. In this issue here *(points out issue on desk)* we have the story of the gold searcher in the Amazon, and we have a lot of *dossiers.*

DAK: *When you print other material, if you serialize DC Comics' THE SHADOW or WATCHMEN in CORTO MALTESE magazine, will you also then collect it and publish it as a book?*

FULVIA: Yes. I would publish first DARK KNIGHT in a book. I'll start in the magazine with the first chapter, and then I'll eventually collect the complete book with the four stories. I want to include material like this in CORTO MALTESE, because I want that the reader of classic adventure, and so on, to have an introduction to the other comics — fantasy and science fiction and like this.

Sketch by Hugo Pratt.

DAK: *We noticed you had THE WATCHMEN on your bookshelf, and DC's SHADOW --*

FULVIA: Yes, I am taking a look around, at the production of the United States, of the French, and we want to publish in CORTO MALTESE in the next year, for the first time, something that is adventure — but not adventure like classic CORTO MALTESE or like **Milo Manara.** I think there is no place that they can read this kind of adventure now in Italy. And we want to make an introduction of these cartoons — of BATMAN by **Miller,** or RONIN, or THE WATCHMEN, or SHADOW — because narratively they are very, very interesting

JULIA: *So CORTO MALTESE is very popular and you are able to slip in THE WATCHMEN so people will become aware of it?*

FULVIA: Yes. Because I think that one who loves to read comics has to know everything of the same level, with good narrative and drawing. We don't want popular and commercial cartoons, we want popular and artistic and cultural.

DAK: *The quality.*

FULVIA: Yes, the quality. In Italy we have . weekly adventures, they are magazines, they are commercial, very popular -- I know they sell a lot of copies — but I prefer to sell less copies and make something good, alive in the culture.

DAK: *We noticed here a greater variety in the level of comics material, the quality level, than I think any other country including the United States. We saw the pornographic —*

FULVIA: Yes, I know, they have a big success, but I am not interested in this kind. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *And we've seen every level in between, from very nice quality material on down. You in Italy have every level. But, your publications are at the higher end of the whole range?*

FULVIA: There are no other publications like LINUS, in conflict with LINUS, in competition. LINUS is the only magazine you will find in Italy of its kind; it's the *first* and it remains the only one. We have no other satirical and . . . and *everything* about the young life of the readers.

DAK: *I noticed that you also have DOONESBURY.*

FULVIA: Yes, we connect a lot.

DAK: *And it's directed certainly at adults.*

FULVIA: Yes. I talk to young people, young readers, from 16, 17, but the most important age of our readers are from 20 to 30.

DAK: *I think that is now the American comics readers' average.*

FULVIA: Yes. There is also younger but they watch the television, this is because of the Japanese cartoons, so terrible. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *When Frank Miller interviewed them in COMICS INTERVIEW #52, Koike and Kojima said that in Japan comics are*

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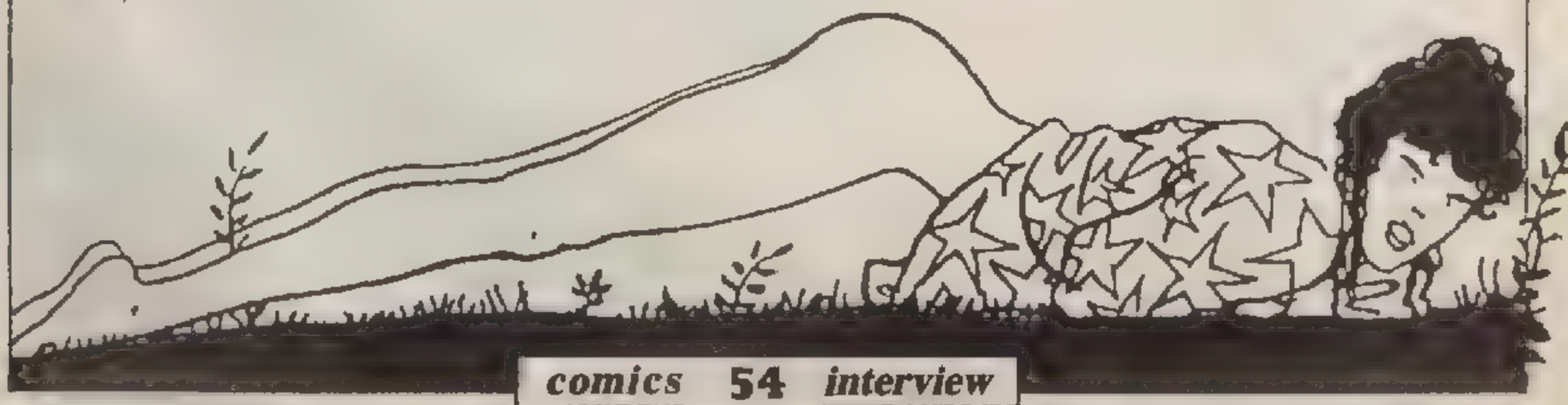
Milo Manara's sensuous style.



"Sex, Yuppies, and Porno Heroes."

more popular than television — that's very curious.

FULVIA: Yes, that's *very* curious.

DAK: *If we could figure out why comics are so successful there —*

FULVIA: Maybe because they use the reader more. We have a history in which the cartoons were considered a low cultural level, as something not good for the mental progress of the readers. Because they confused the comic with the photo-romance — they are *another* kind of thing, and in Italy the word *fumetti* meant both comics and photo-romances.

DAK: *The photo-romances — for the people reading this who have never seen them — are like a television soap opera told with photographs and models but using a comic-book type of storytelling.*

FULVIA: Yes. They use a photograph and words, like comics, in the same way, very popular.

DAK: *In the United States we're growing out of a period where comic books were looked upon as for children only. What we're seeing now is work from a generation that has grown up with comics and is producing comics for older readers. It's a similar process that's going on.*

FULVIA: Yes. We pass through many American authors in LINUS. We published **Crumb**, the underground author. We always attempt to bring attention to all of the *progress*, all of the things that happen in the comics.

DAK: *Have you considered publishing MAUS?*

FULVIA: *Yes,* we have published MAUS, and we stopped because **Art Spiegelman** stopped, and now we are publishing the book. We have to be very attentive to every new phenomenon that appears. We have BC, we have WIZARD OF ID, we have DOONESBURY; and two years ago when I was with **Schulz** and showed him the SNOOPY project, I read BLOOM COUNTY in the papers and I loved it so much that I now translate it for LINUS and we publish and it has a very big success.

DAK: *We have been told that MICKEY MOUSE is very popular in Italy.*

FULVIA: Yes, MICKEY MOUSE is very, very popular, maybe because it represents the good American face of the New Deal, of the period that we need to have something to trust in. Maybe he started in the right period.

DAK: *And it's still very popular?*

FULVIA: Yes. And the other one, DONALD DUCK, is maybe more important than MICKEY MOUSE, but the name is MICKEY MOUSE.

JULIA: *And of course it also has a lot of very good animated cartoon backup appearing on TV.*

FULVIA: Yes, the contrary of what happened with PEANUTS. PEANUTS has a very poor representation in comics animation.

JULIA: *It's very, very simple, what they're saying.*

FULVIA: Yes.

JULIA: *It adds weight to what they're saying.*

FULVIA: They are not like MICKEY MOUSE and DONALD DUCK where they have a lot of characters doing things like a spy story or science fiction or a money story like UNCLE SCROOGE

DAK: *My hero.* (Laughter.)

FULVIA: Your hero and your desire, to plunge in a swimming pool full of money. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *I think everybody can relate to that. (Laughter.)*

FULVIA: But I prefer DONALD DUCK instead — I like the three nephews, Qui, Quo, Qua.

DAK: *Who would be known in America as Huey, Dewey, and Louie.*

FULVIA: Yes: "Qui" is the translation of "Here," and "Quo" is "Nonsense," and "Qua" is "There." *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *That's an example of taking something and intelligently translating it. That adds an extra meaning to it.*

FULVIA: Yes.

JULIA: *And it sort of sounds like Quack Quack Quack.*

FULVIA: Yes, because of the little ducks. *(Laughter.)*

JULIA: *That's clever.*

FULVIA: And also we have a very good translator in LINUS. There once appeared a small brother of Linus that they call

Fumetti — the Italian word for "comics" means both comics and photo-romances — depicted above.

SHE-HULK: "the ideal girl of the '80s, big tits."

Copyright ©1990 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.

THE SAVAGE SHE-HULK **by** TED BOONTHANAKIT.

Rerun, so in Italy we translate it as Reprise, to mean new and like Linus.

JULIA: *Could you translate this LINUS cover — we would like to use this and it would be very nice to have a translation into English.*

FULVIA: This is, "I don't see the time that the vacation will stop, will finish." And the baby says, "So we go back to school and see the return of the COBAS." The COBAS are the group of teachers that strike, that make strong strikes in the schools. So they go to the school only to see what the COBAS are doing. COBAS is something like Basic Committee, the union, and they make very big difficulties for the school board.

JULIA: *It's like the National Union.*

FULVIA: Yes. We have always the COBAS, COBAS in the planes, COBAS in the train — the strong new kind of worker that connect themselves to strike and to make things change. This is the new one, stronger and more aggressive. This is the meaning of this.

DAK: *I noticed in this latest issue of LINUS there's an article on American comics.*

FULVIA: Yes.

DAK: *It has something on DARK KNIGHT and something on SHE-HULK.*

JULIA: *What does this* (indicates a heading) *translate as?*

FULVIA: Let me see . . . "Sex, Yuppies, and Porno Heroes." *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *What does it say about SHE-HULK?*

FULVIA: "THE SAVAGE SHE-HULK of the Marvel Comics; green; tall, two meters; throws cars to another part of the city with only one hand, she is very strong; the ideal girl of the '80s, big tits." *(Laughter.)* Every author of our articles has satirical insight. "I must admit," he says — the expert on tits in the comics — "that this kind of comic is sexist and misogynist and regressive, but don't forget that the physical form is an enlargement of the sexual origins. In the '70s the fashion became the actual look of the body building, both masculine and femunine. So the artist doesn't draw only Mr. Muscle, but now gives us a female with muscles, very strong, and tits that are proportionate." *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *I wrote those SHE-HULKs.* (Laughter.)

FULVIA: In our magazine we have news about everything happening in the world that is interesting for our readers. Our reader's are intelligent, sophisticated, creative, and don't want to have the same thing that they can find in other magazines.

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

SO MUCH FOR STAN LEE!

Dear DAK,

You would have enjoyed **Julius Schwartz's** introductory remarks (at the Atlanta Fantasy Fair), prefacing **Jack Kirby's** receipt of the Lifetime Achievement Award.

Basically, J.S. said in year 19 ___, those two guys invented Superman, in 19___ **Bob Kane** and **Bill Finger** created Batman, "and everything else was created by **Jack Kirby.**" So much for **Stan Lee!**

Since I wasn't "present at the creation," as it were, and as something of a historian dislike relying on second- and third-hand sources entirely . although of course first hand sources often lie I am in no position to take a stand on it one way or another, *but* . . . I wonder.

As a writer, I admittedly am biased in favor of the writer (**Lee** in this case). The one who actually *invented* Spider-Man, et al., is the one who said first, in effect, "let's have this guy with a spider's powers — a web, etc." Is **Kirby** claiming he's that one? This whole **Kirby**-created-'em-all has a suspiciously "party-line" smell to me, although for all I know, maybe **Stan Lee** *did* rip off all **Kirby's** concepts. I wasn't there. But anything **Gary Groth** and THE COMICS JOURNAL socialists believe is probably bunk.

Bill Chadwick
76 Twelfth St., Apt. #8
Atlanta, GA 30309

CALLING KOTEAS!

Dear Mr. Kraft,

I recently picked up the COMICS INTERVIEW SUPER SPECIAL: TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES and was thoroughly delighted with the interviews within. Thank you so much!

My only regret is that you did not do an interview with **Elias Koteas.** I have been searching for *anything* written on the man does he not *do* interviews? I've seen him in the movies SOME KIND OF WONDERFUL, FRIENDS, LOVERS AND LUNATICS as well as starring in MALAREK (among others) and written to a column in the TORONTO SUN newspaper that seeks out elusive information, but with no luck.

Perhaps you might do an interview with him in the near future, or help me contact him myself? Any assistance would be most appreciated.

Terri Straw
4340 Bathurst St., Apt. #607
Downsview, Ontario
Canada M3H 3R5

If there are any readers out there who might be able to help, please contact Terri at the above address.

DAK

BULLSHIT!

Dear COMICS INTERVIEW

It's sad, but it needs to be said. THE COMICS JOURNAL is an embarrassment.

Whatever sustenance of spirit **Gary Groth** once drew from comics to inspire his efforts all these years has curdled and soured to the point where it's not just ugly, but stinks.

The **Jack Kirby** issue (JOURNAL #134) succeeds in smearing **Stan Lee** and **Kirby**, both one-time idols of **Groth's**. Where once he sought to be seen as championing **Kirby's** cause against mighty Marvel, his campaign has degenerated into a puerile "my father's better than your father" "**John Lennon**

COMICS INTERVIEW #89

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

was the real genius behind The Beatles, not **Paul McCartney**" position.

But now it's taken a new twist. Now he's determined to show, ever so cleverly, that they were *both* creeps. Which is, in a way, compatible with his other (unstated yet obvious) attitude: that heroes are somehow a fraud, and only the ugly and ordinary is worthy of being considered "art." Look at the kind of thing Fantagraphics publishes and lauds in print then remind yourself that **Lee & Kirby** created the Marvel age of *superheroes*. Is it any wonder that he seeks to undermine them *both*?

It does no service to **Kirby** to expose him in print as nakedly concerned with making a buck, nor to exploit his emotions, failing memory and ego merely to incite him to make claims which even his peer and onetime partner **Joe Simon** contradicts in the same issue

With friends like **Groth,** who needs enemies?

I much prefer COMICS INTERVIEW's even-handed approach. The **Jack Kirby** interview you published in issue #41 [*still available in the MASTERS OF MARVEL super special edition — DAK*] not only includes better early, unpublished photographs of **Kirby,** and a superior sampling of his art, but allows the man to retain his dignity.

For years, I have hungered for an interview with **Steve Ditko,** but have reluctantly come to appreciate the artist's stubborn desire to let his work speak for itself. After reading **Kirby's** interview in COMICS JOURNAL, I understand **Ditko's** position and see how taking advantage of and manipulating an artist in his failing years can actually serve to *detract* from his achievements and tarnish the integrity of his work.

Even in this base act of shame, however, it appears **Groth** has no shame. By that I mean, he appears not even to care about the standards of journalism he once took such pride in setting for the comics field. Misspellings, bad grammar and sloppy editing abound embarrassingly throughout the **Kirby** piece, and elsewhere, to a degree previously unexampled even in the JOURNAL. Surely, an artist of the stature of **Jack Kirby** deserves at least a *cursory* proofing!

Surely, someone at Fantagraphics knows the proper spelling of temperament! Knows about "e" before "i" in the word "receive." Knows the difference between goddam and goddamn; between there, they're or their; between effect and affect. Just as anyone who's read comics scripted by **Stan Lee** can easily tell the difference from those scripted by **Jack Kirby.** Gary certainly knows these things. But he no longer cares, and it's a measure of his contempt for comics and the rest of us that he makes only a feeble attempt, if any, to set facts, spellings or grammar straight.

John Byrne, among others, has spoken of "the destroyers." Those who cannot create, only destroy. It seems that, articulate with rage and frustration at not being able to create, **Groth** has chosen instead to destroy. His friends. His foes. His inspirations and idols. Anyone and everyone. From his juvenile admiration for heroic comics and their creators (**Lee & Kirby** for a start, let us not forget! followed by **Steranko** and **Miller** and **Ellison** and **Eisner** and many another — each, in turn, first put on a pillar in the pages of THE JOURNAL only, inevitably, to be pilloried later in those same pages) **Groth** has "grown" (no pun intended) to an increasing infatuation with the sleazy, the underground, the mundane.

In his ongoing fascination and identification with losers and the loathsome, he has created a cult of the meretricious (to use one of his own favorite words the other in his all-too-limited and redundant vocabulary being "egregious"). With disciples such as **Kenneth "Knucklehead" Smith** to do all the heavy work with the thesaurus for him, it seems Gary no longer needs to bother learning any new big words. After all, **Groth** is probably too busy negotiating for American translations of decadent European comics in which tawdry and meaningless fornication and lurid violence abound or commissioning his own "originals" in the form of the "Eros" imprint — some improvement over the oft-decried "fight scenes" and continual conflicts of American superheroes and supervillains over matters of principle!

I sometimes think that when **Groth** looks in the mirror, it must be ex-Marvel editor **Shooter** staring back out at him, their posturings and personalities seem so alike. I couldn't believe how shallow and phony **Groth** came across in his interview with the equally shallow and phony **Joe Simon** in the same edition of the JOURNAL. Whew! And he dares to talk about **Lee** being a "bullshit artist"!

I started out writing this response to THE COMICS JOURNAL., but remembered seeing various letters in your magazine from people who had about as much chance to receive fair treatment by writing Marvel or DC directly as I would sending this letter to Fantagraphics. Since I don't hold the "correct" opinion, I'd only get the usual party line treatment in THE JOURNAL ("informed of their errors" indeed — shades of **Stalin!**), so I've sent it to INTERVIEW instead, where at least I won't have to suffer a smart-alecky self-righteous load of **Gary Groth's** bullshit in response!

Jerry Luft
P.O. Box 15315
Gainesville, FL 32604

Alas, even here in INTERVIEW, you may not be immune — since we offer an open forum (which is why we attract so many of the types of letters you mention). Oh, and just for the record, I've enjoyed reading THE JOURNAL for quite a few years, myself although I find it a bit too predictable, pedantic and oddly dated in its viewpoint in recent years.

– DAK

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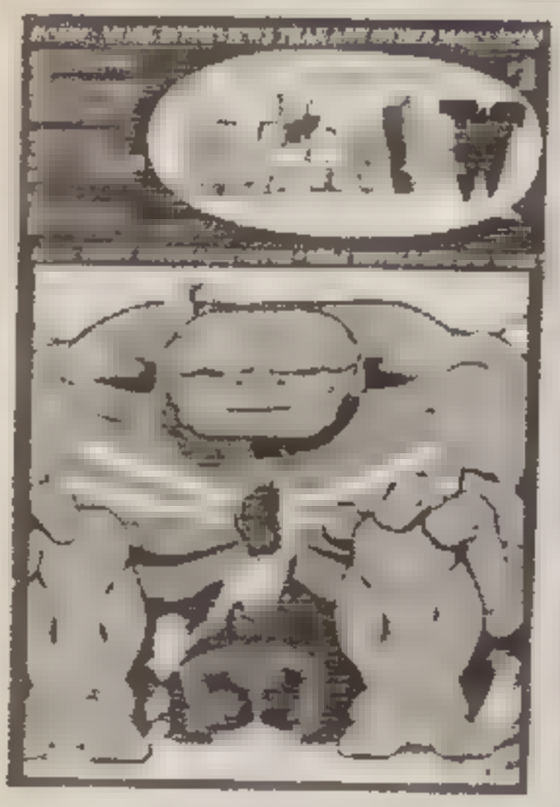

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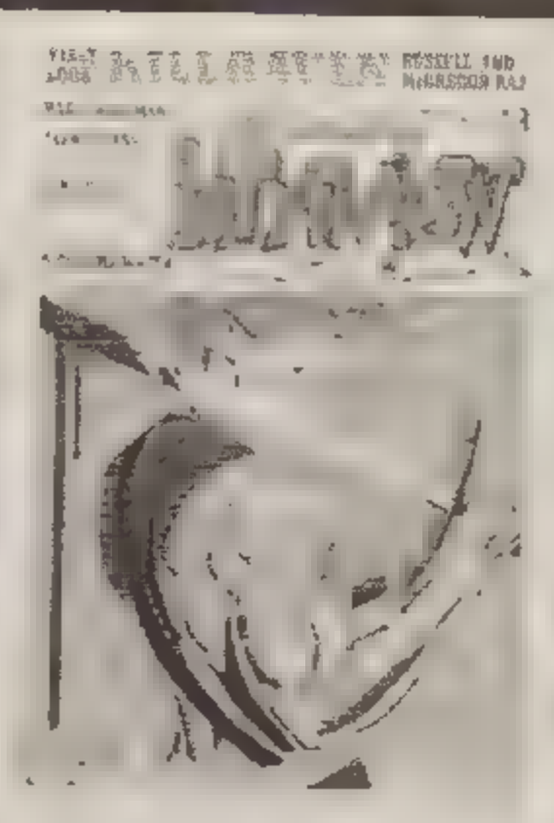

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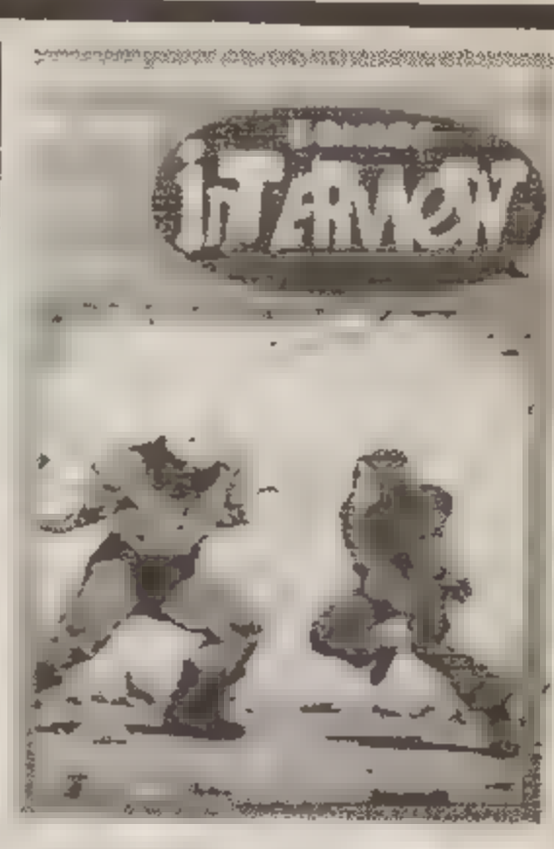

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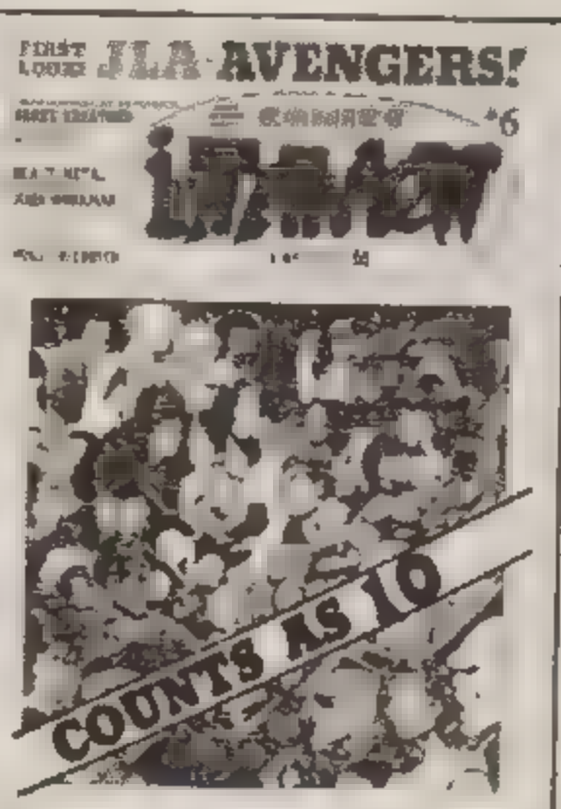

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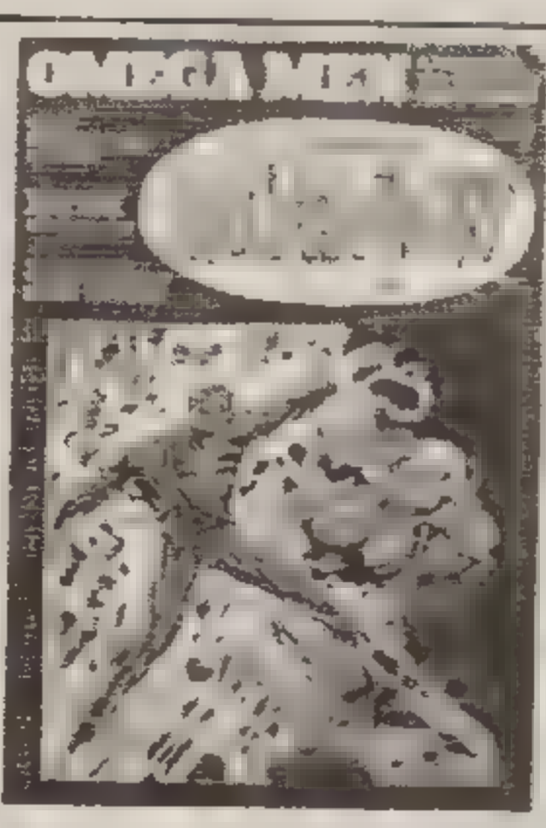

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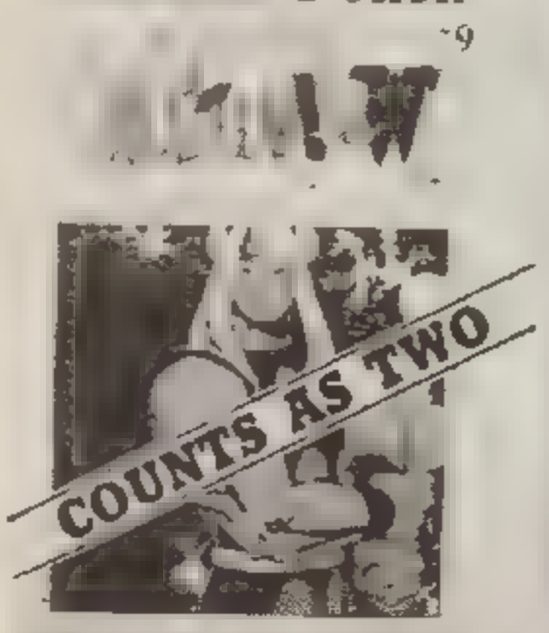

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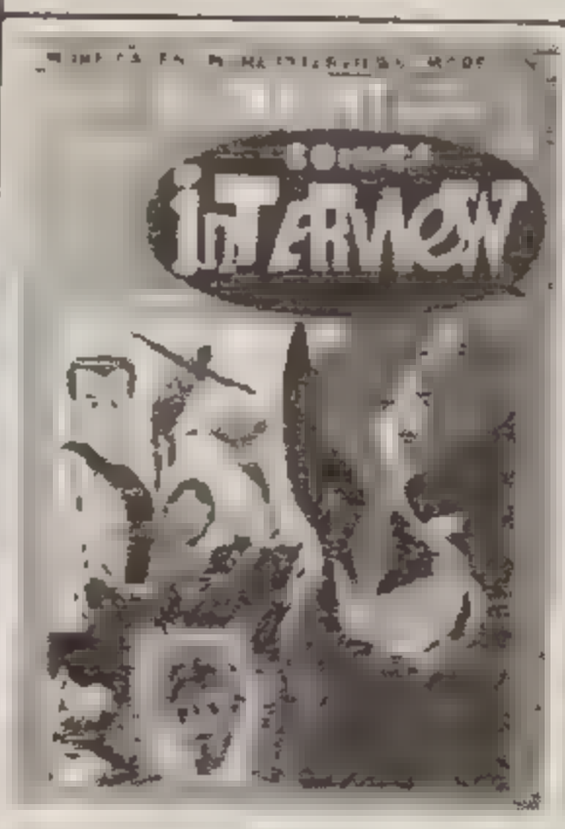

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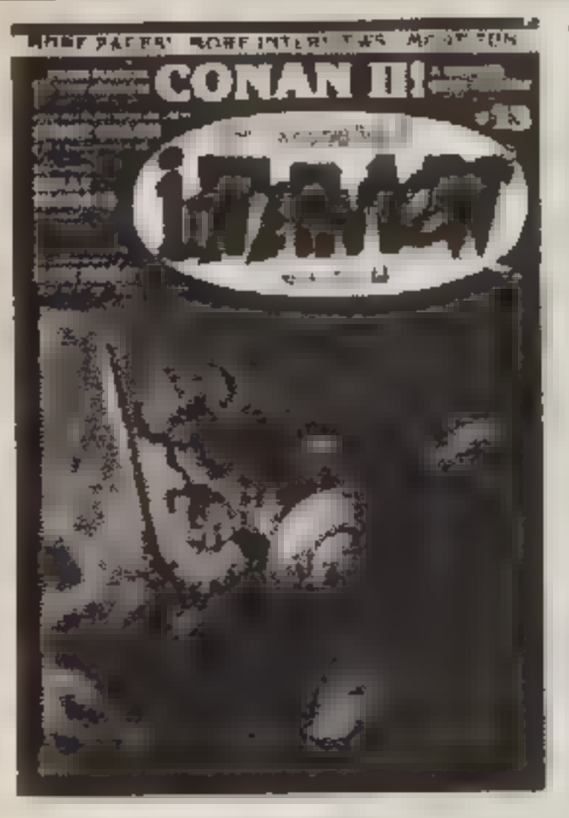

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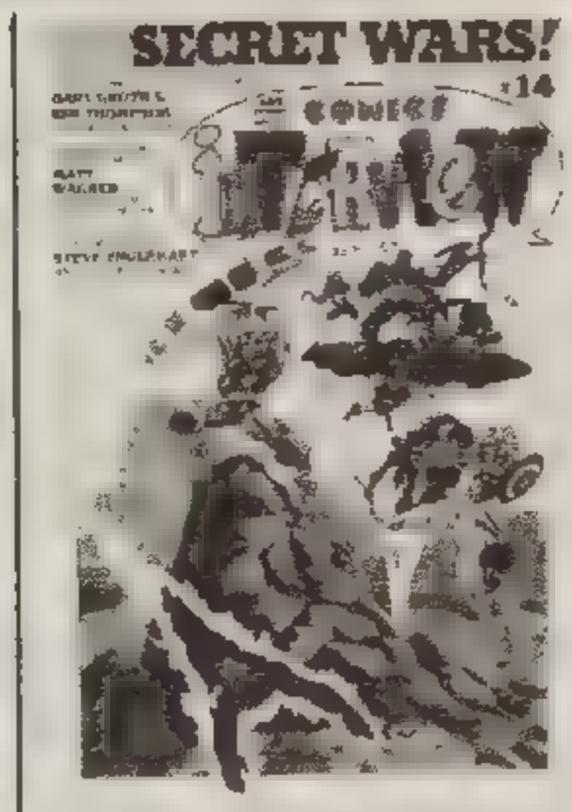

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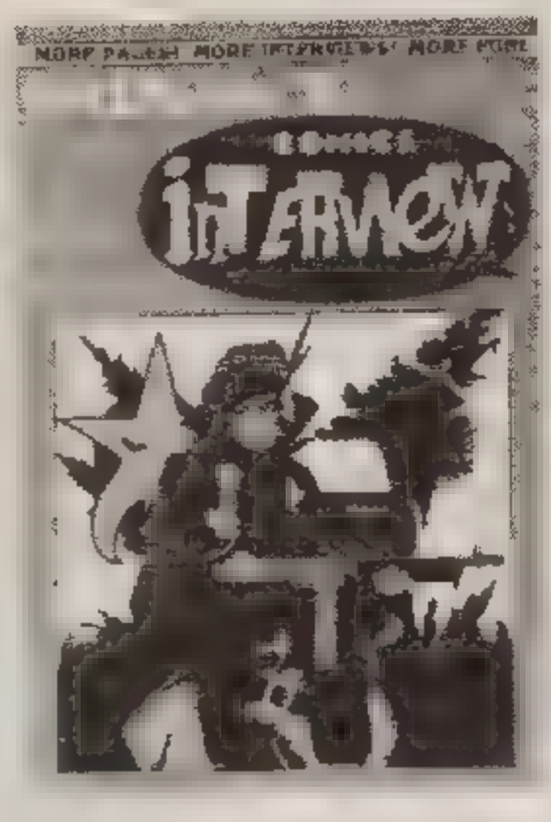

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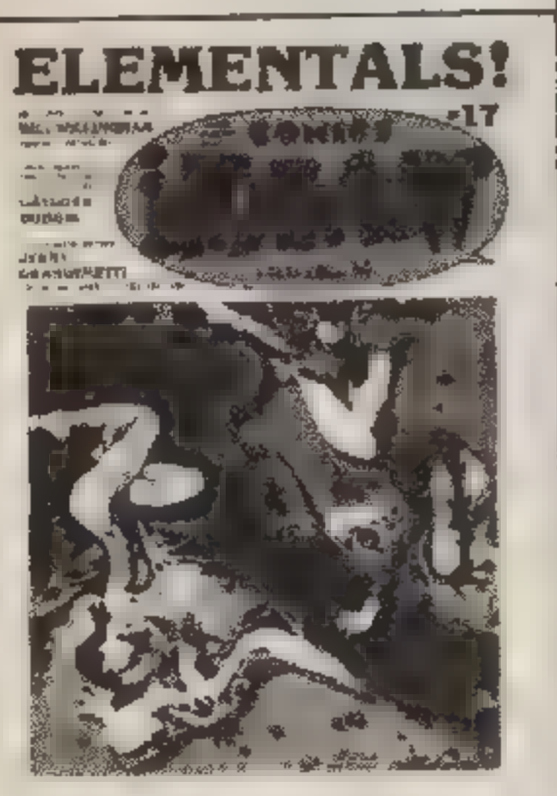

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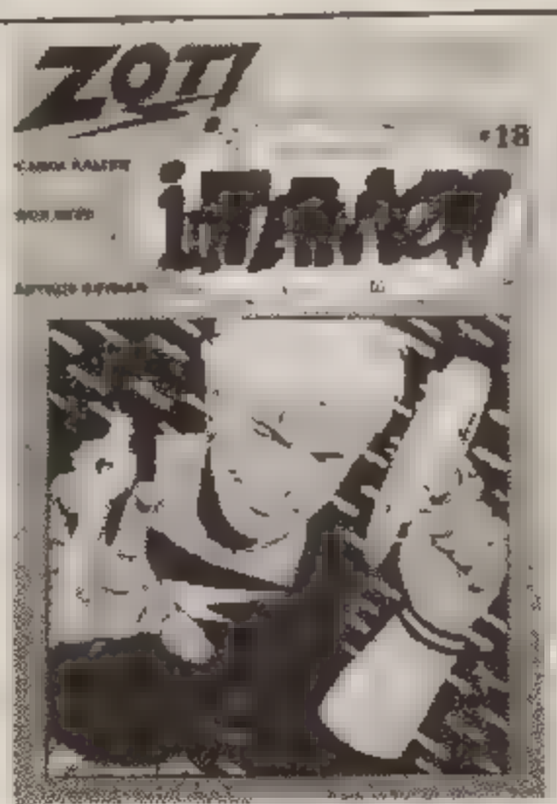

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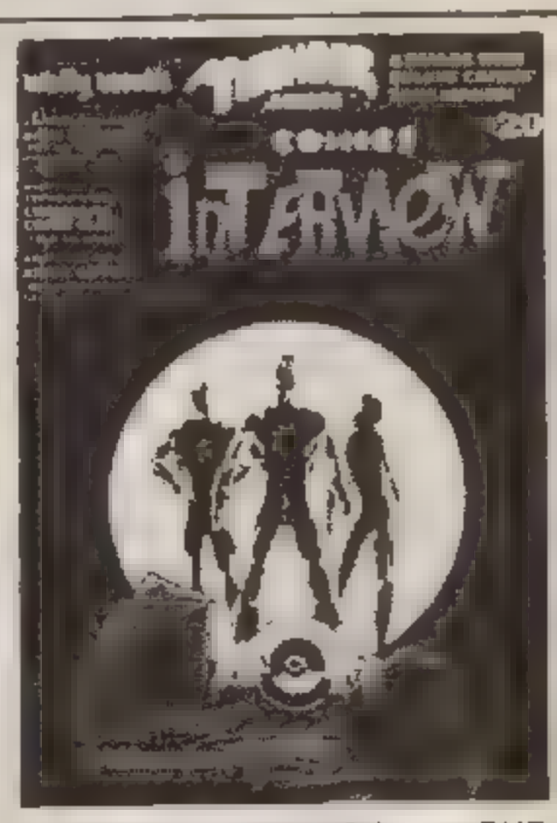

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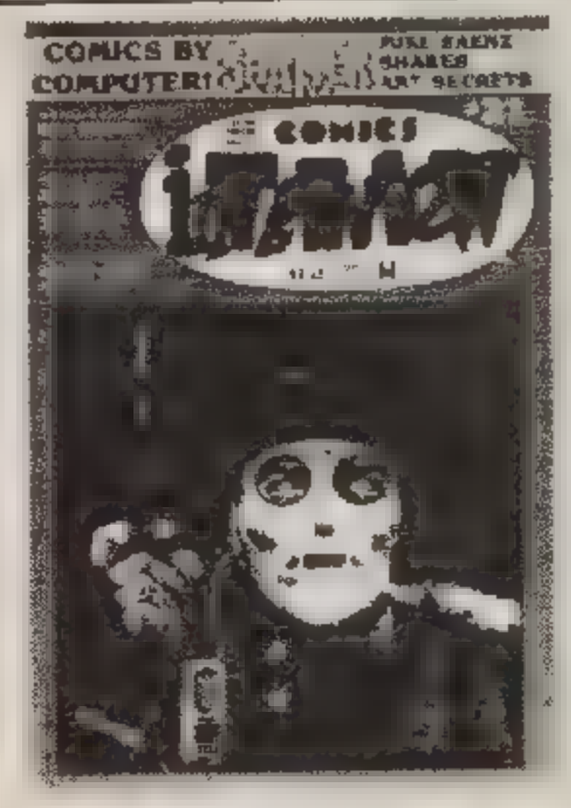

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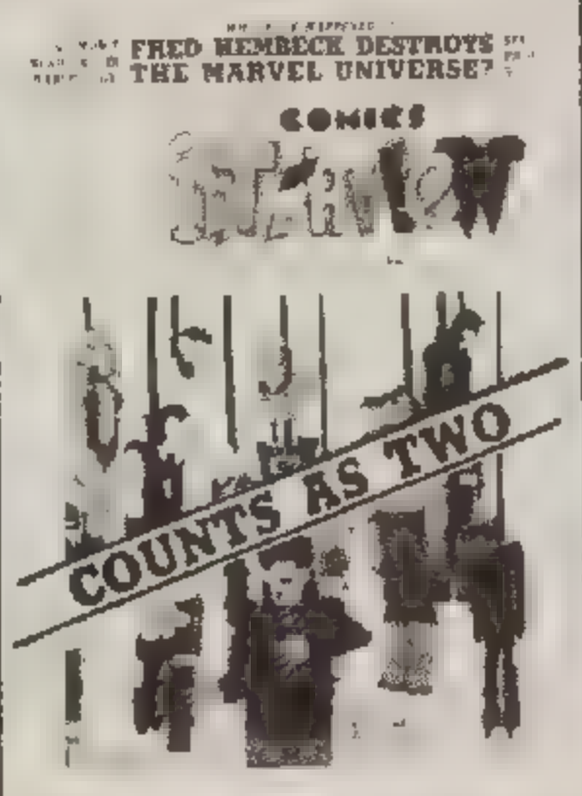

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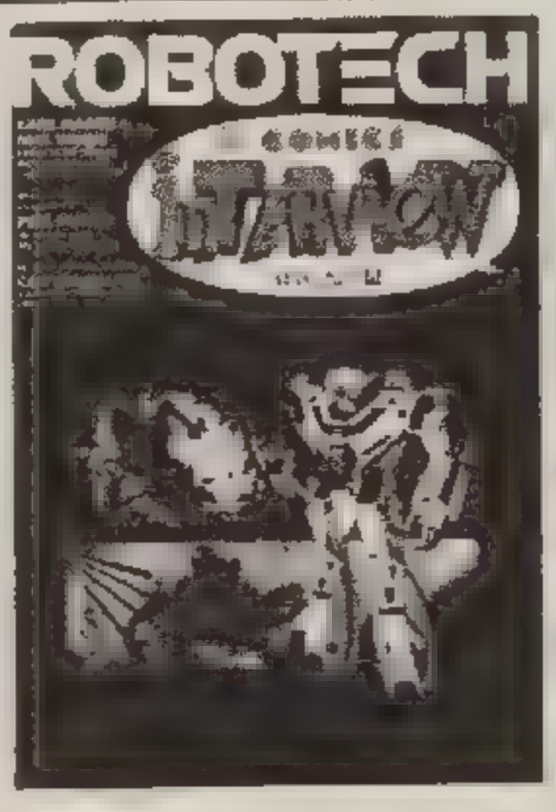

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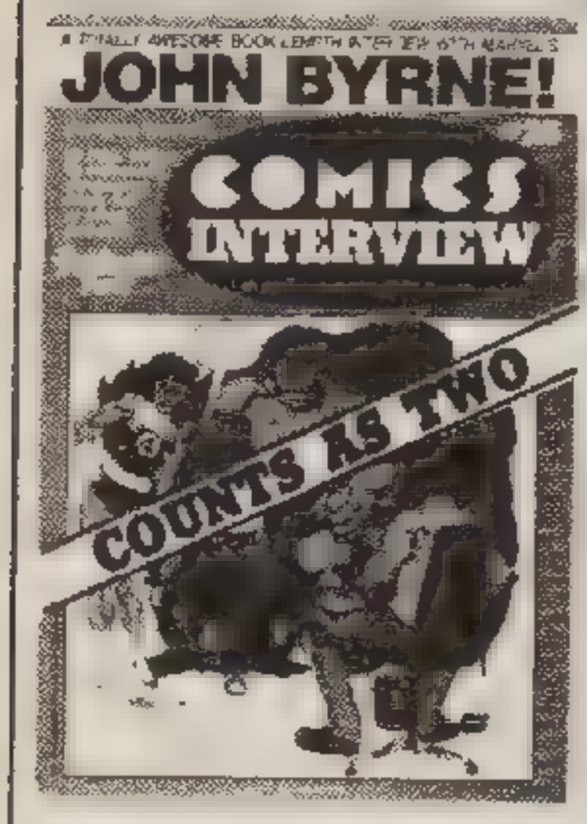

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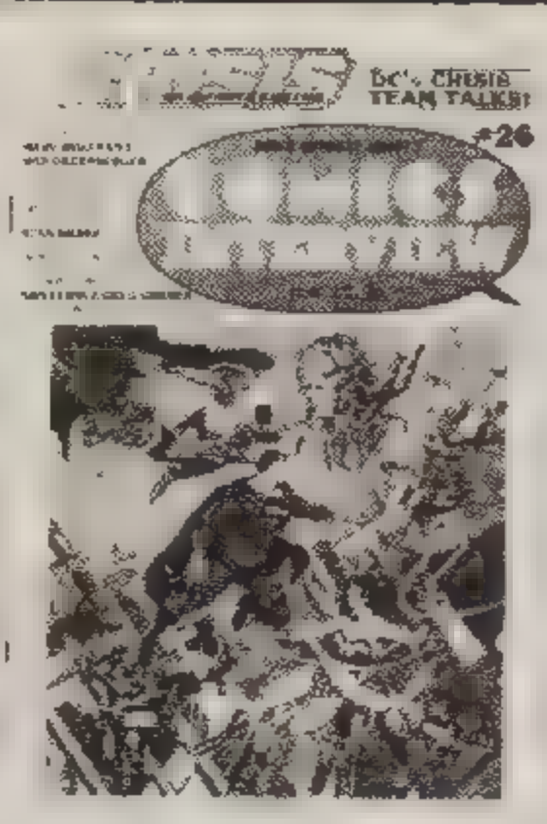

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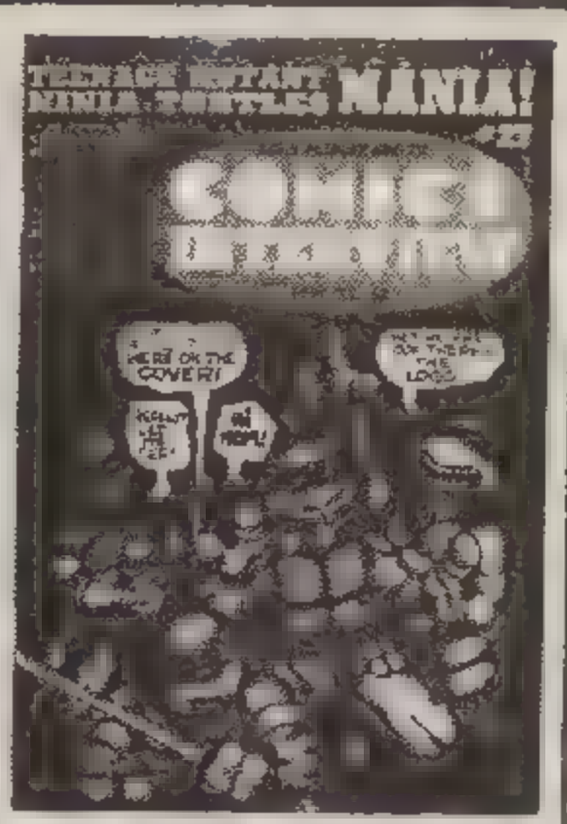

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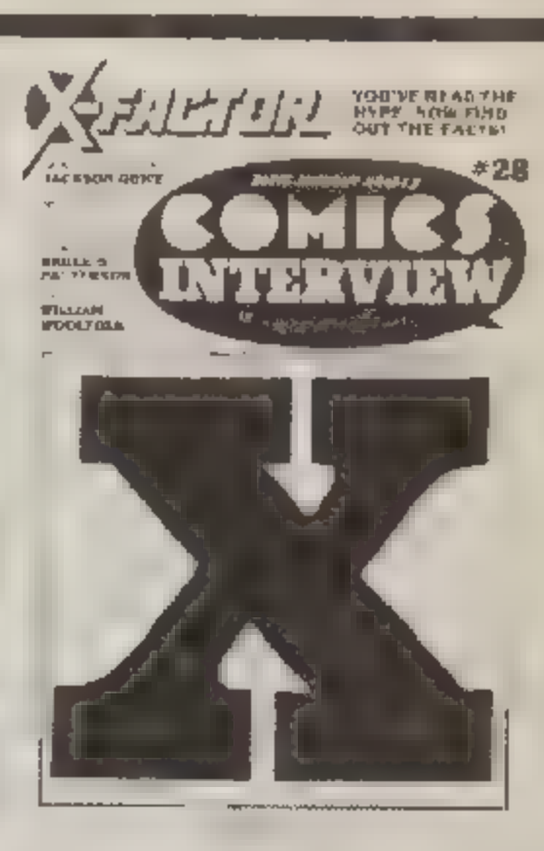

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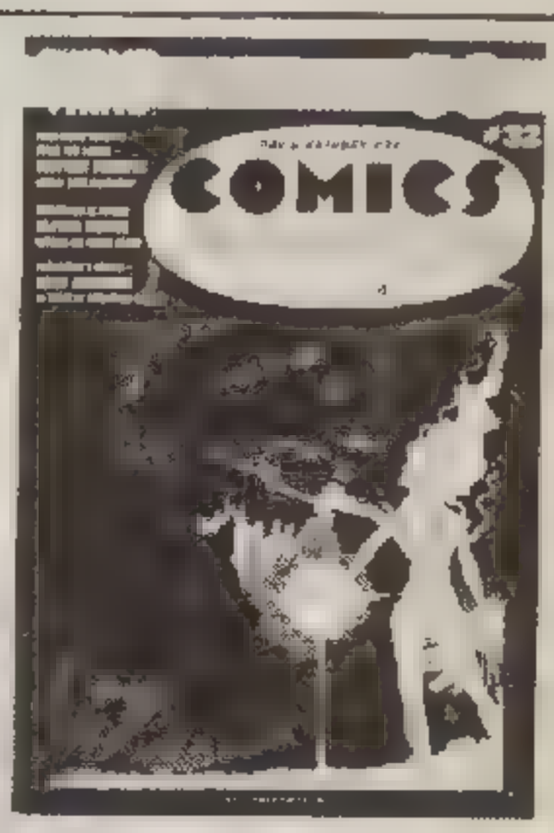

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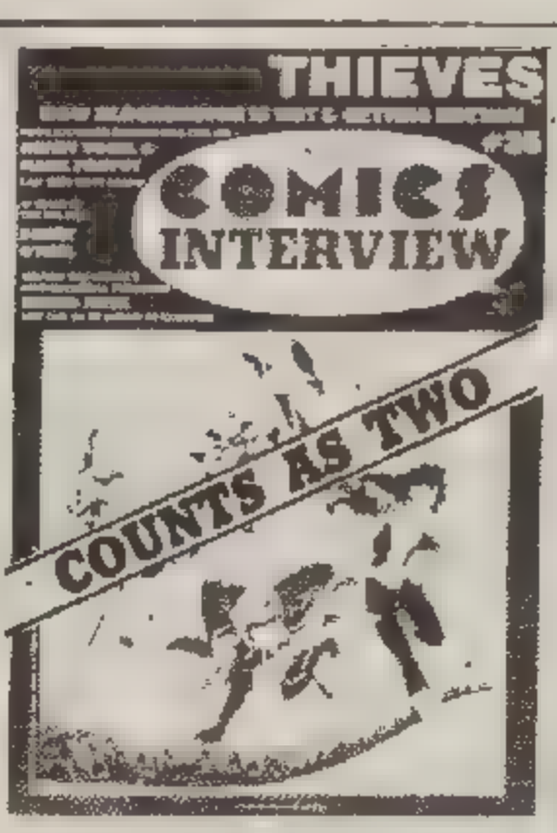

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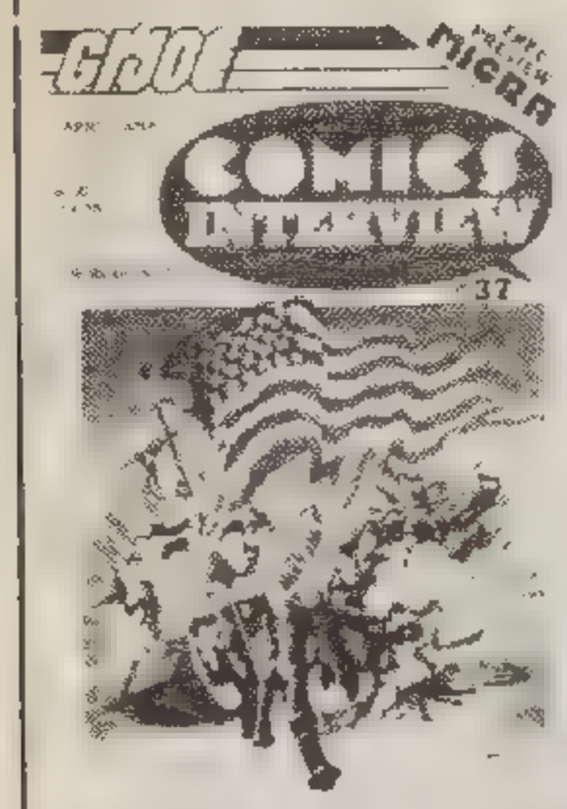

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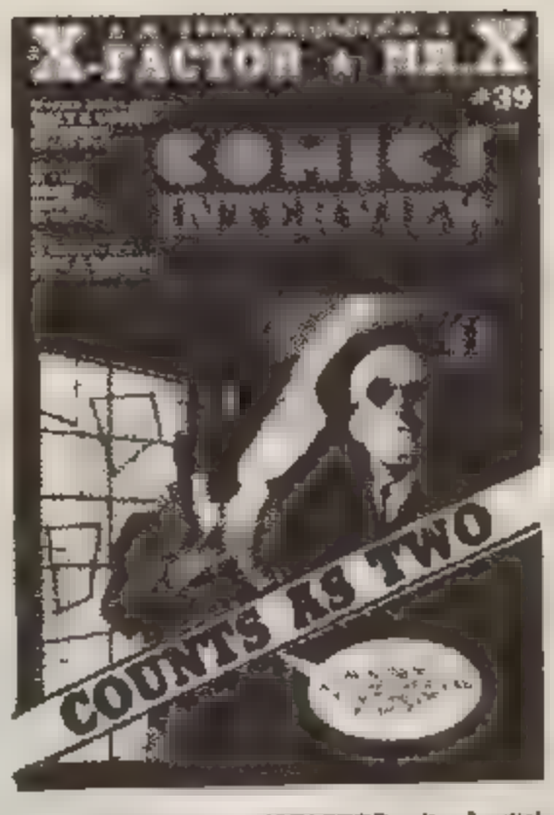

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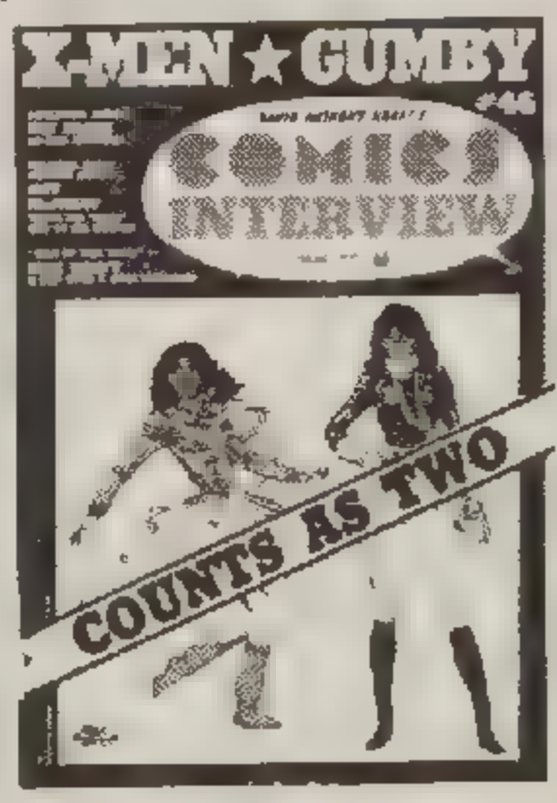

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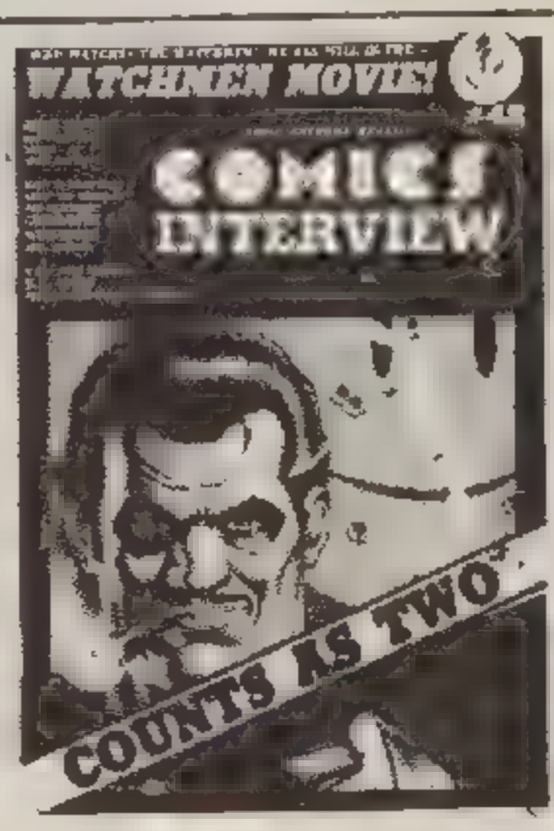

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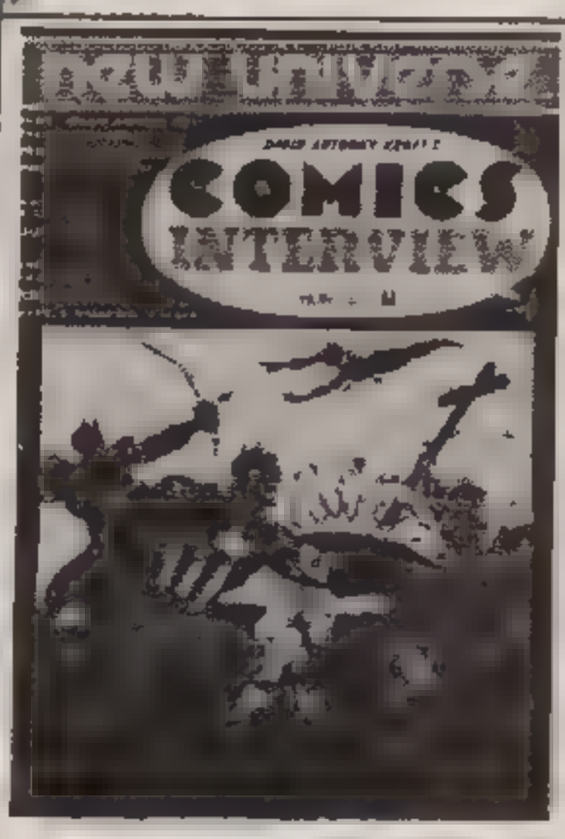

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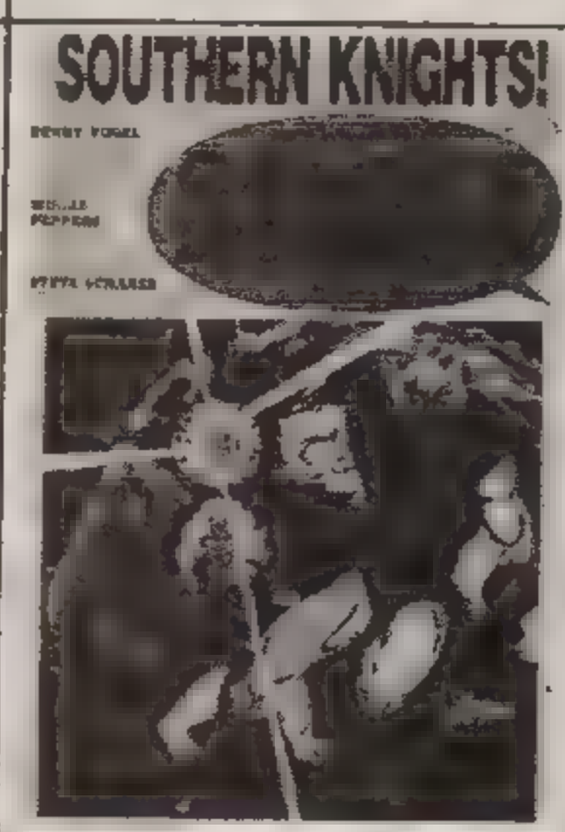

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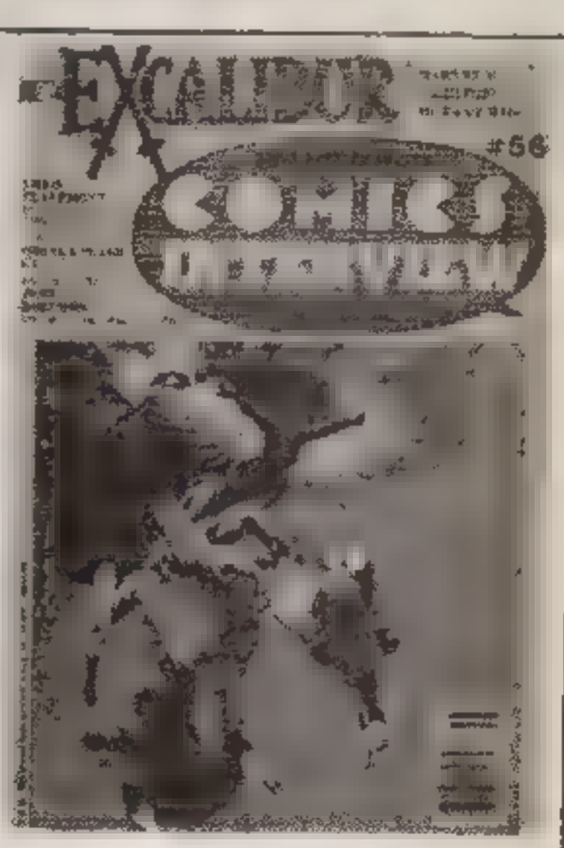

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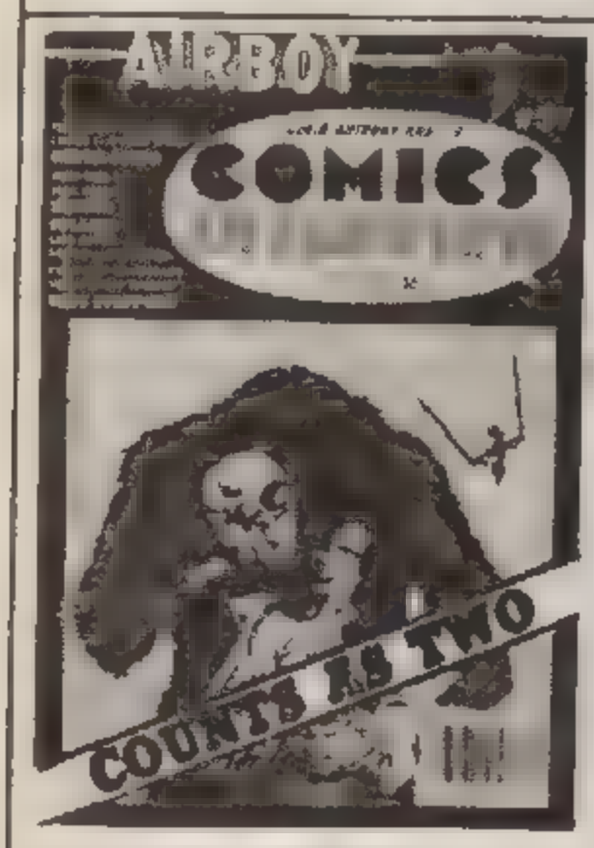

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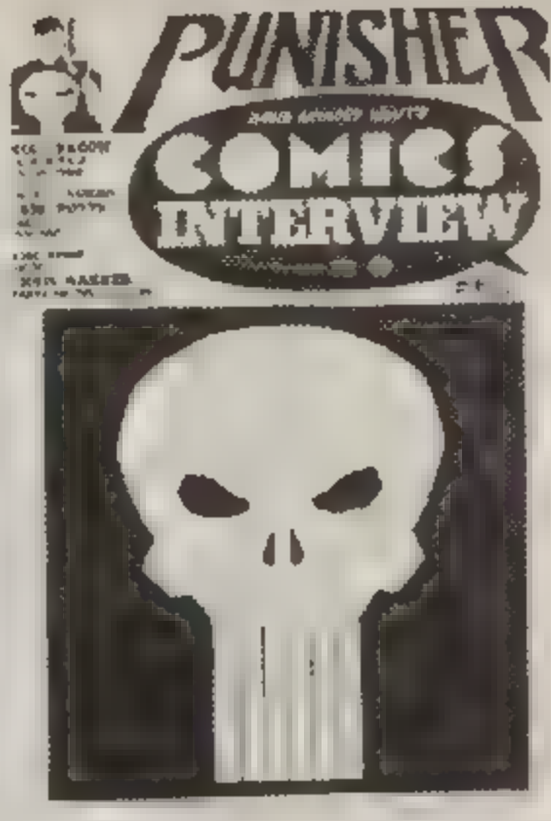

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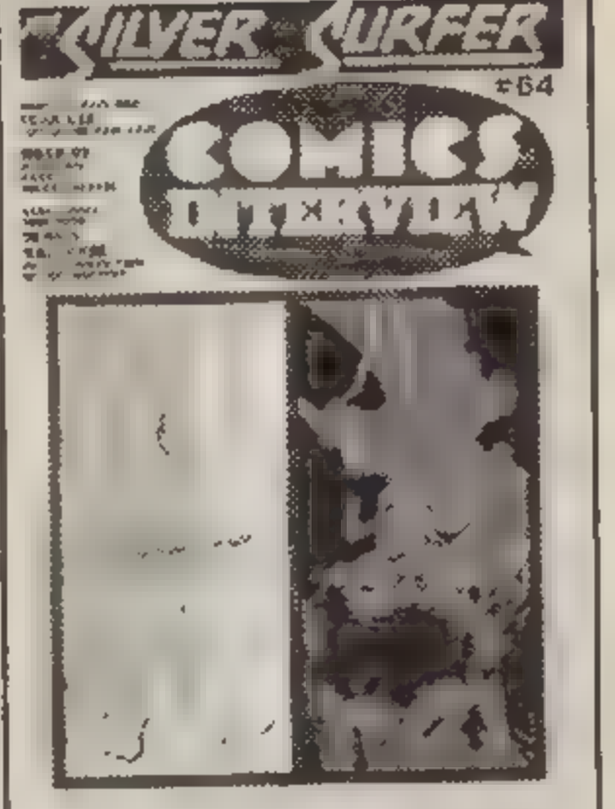

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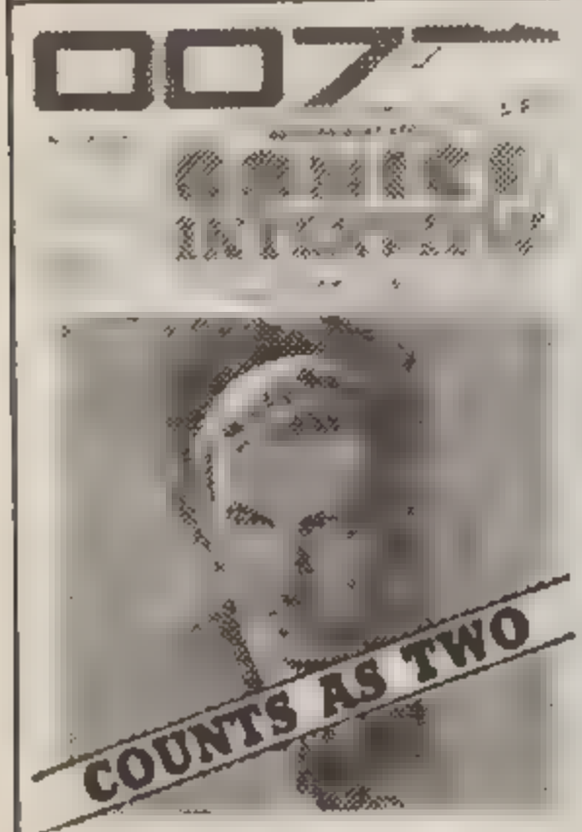

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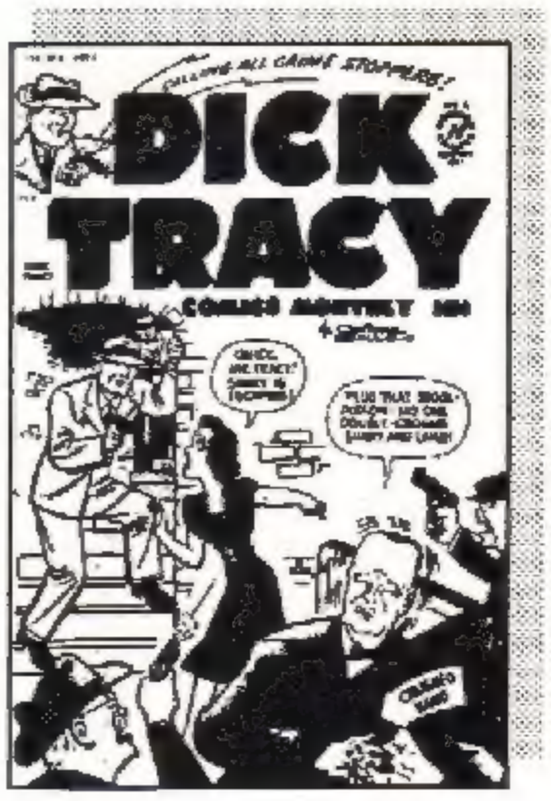

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